

J. S. D. Harris,
12th 1930.

DAY AND NIGHT
STORIES

The novels and tales of
Guy de Maupassant



Boule de Suif
Mlle Fifi
That Pig, Morm
A Woman's Life
The Sisters Rondoli
Miss Harriet
Bel Ami
Yvette
Day and Night Stories
Little Roque
Mont Oriol
The Floila
Pierre and Jean
The Olive Orchard
Strong as Death
Useless Beauty
A Woman's Heart
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The novels and tales of
Guy de Maupassant

• IX •

Day & Night
Stories



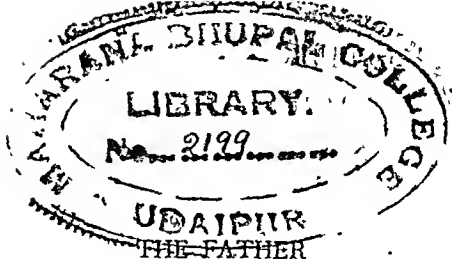
Alfred A. Knopf  Publisher, London

CONTENTS

	PAGE
<i>The Father</i>	I
<i>Confessing</i>	11
<i>The Necklace</i>	17
<i>Happiness</i>	27
<i>The Old Man</i>	34
<i>A Coward</i>	43
<i>The Drunkard</i>	53
<i>A Vendetta</i>	59
<i>Coco</i>	65
<i>The Hand</i>	70
<i>The Tramp</i>	78
<i>A Parricide</i>	84
<i>The Little One</i>	91
<i>Guillemot Rock</i>	98
<i>Timbuctoo</i>	103
<i>A True Story</i>	112
<i>Farewell</i>	118
<i>A Memory</i>	124
<i>The Confession</i>	132
<i>A Humble Drama</i>	138
<i>Master Belhomme's Beast</i>	144

	PAGE
<i>For Sale</i>	154
<i>The Unknown</i>	161
<i>The Secret</i>	168
<i>The Christening</i>	174
<i>Indiscretion</i>	180
<i>A Madman</i>	188

DAY AND NIGHT
STORIES



HE WAS EMPLOYED AT THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, AND AS he lived in the Batignolles suburb he took the omnibus every morning to go to his office. And every morning he travelled to the centre of Paris facing a girl, with whom he fell in love.

He went to her work in a shop at the same time every day. She was small and dark, one of those brunettes whose eyes are so dark that they are like pitch balls stuck in her face, and whose skin has the gleam of ivory. Every day he saw her appear at the corner of the same street; and she would start running to catch up the heavy vehicle. She ran with short, hurried steps, supple and graceful, and would jump on to the step before the horses had quite stopped. Then she would make her way into the inside, panting a little, and, sitting down, would glance all round her.

The first time that he saw her, François Tessier knew that her face gave him infinite pleasure. [Sometimes we meet such women, women whom we desire to seize fiercely in our arms, at first sight, before we even know them.] This girl answered all the intimate desires, the secret dreams, the very ideal of love, as it were, which we bear about with us in the subconscious depths of our hearts.

Against his will he stared obstinately at her. His gaze embarrassed her and she blushed. He noticed this, and tried to turn away his eyes, but time and again they returned to her in spite of his efforts to fix his gaze elsewhere.

At the end of a few days they were no longer strangers, although they had never spoken to each other. He gave her his seat when the omnibus was full and went up on the top, in spite of the torture of loss it inflicted upon him. She greeted

him now with a little smile ; and though she always lowered her eyes under his gaze, which she felt to be too eager, yet she no longer seemed angry at being watched.

At last they began to talk to each other. A sudden, intimate friendship was established between them, an intimacy confined to half an hour each day. And certainly it was the most delightful half-hour of his day. He thought of her all the rest of the time, and never ceased to dwell on the vision of her during his long sojourns at the office, haunted, obsessed, and invaded by the changing, clinging image which the face of a beloved woman leaves with us. It seemed to him that complete possession of that little creature would be for him a wild happiness, almost beyond human realisation.

Every morning now she shook hands with him, and he retained until evening the sense of that contact, the memory in his flesh of the faint pressure of her small fingers ; he imagined that he preserved the imprint of them on his skin.

Throughout the rest of his time he looked forward anxiously to the short omnibus journey. And his Sundays seemed heart-breaking.

She loved him too, not a doubt of it, for one Saturday in the spring she consented to lunch with him the next day at Maisons-Laffitte.

She arrived first at the station, and was waiting for him. He was surprised ; but she said to him :

"Before we go, I've something to say. We've twenty minutes ; that's more than long enough."

She was trembling, leaning on his arm, her eyes lowered and her cheeks pale.

"You must make no mistake about me," she continued. "I'm an honest girl, and I won't come with you unless you promise, unless you'll swear not to . . . not to do anything which isn't . . . which isn't . . . nice."

She had suddenly gone more scarlet than a poppy. She

was silent. He did not know what to reply, happy and disappointed at the same time. At the bottom of his heart he possibly preferred that it should be like this ; yet . . . yet he had lulled himself to sleep, the night before, with dreams that had fired his pulses. Certainly he would have loved her less, had he known her to be of easy virtue ; but then how charming, how delicious it would be for him if she were ! His mind was racked by all the selfish calculations that men make over this business of love.

As he said nothing, she added in a voice shaken with emotion, and tears at the corners of her eyes :

“ If you don’t promise to respect me, absolutely . . . I’m going back home.”

He squeezed her arm affectionately and replied :

“ I promise ; you shall do nothing you do not want to do.”

She seemed relieved, and asked with a smile :

“ Is that really true ? ”

He looked into the depths of her eyes.

“ I swear it ! ”

“ Then let’s take the tickets,” she said.

They could hardly speak a word to one another on the way, as their compartment was full.

Having reached Maisons-Laffitte, they directed their steps towards the Seine.

The warm air quieted their thoughts and their senses. The sun fell full upon the river, the leaves, and the grass, and darted a thousand gleams of happiness into body and mind. Hand in hand they walked along the bank, watching the little fish that glided in shoals under the surface of the water. They wandered along, adrift in happiness, as though transported from the earth in an ecstasy of delight.

At last she said :

“ You must think me mad.”

“ Why ? ” he asked.

"Isn't it mad of me to go all alone with you like this?" she went on.

"Why, no; it's quite natural."

"No, no! It's not natural--for me--for I don't want to do anything foolish--and this is just how one does come to do foolish things. But if you only knew! It's so dull, every day the same thing, every day in the month and every month in the year. I live alone with my mother. And since she has had many sorrows in her life, she's not very gay. As for me, I do what I can. I try to laugh, but I don't always succeed. But all the same, it was wrong of me to come. But at least you don't blame me for it?"

For answer he kissed her eagerly upon the ear. But she drew away from him with a swift movement, and said, suddenly vexed:

"Oh, Monsieur François, after what you promised me!"

And they turned back towards Maisons-Laffitte.

They lunched at the Petit-Havre, a low house buried beneath four enormous poplars, and standing on the bank of the river.

The fresh air, the heat, the thin white wine, and the exciting sense of each other's nearness made them flushed, troubled and silent. But after coffee, a sudden tide of joy welled up in them; they crossed the Seine and set off again along the bank towards the village of La Frette.

Suddenly he asked:

"What is your name?"

"Louise."

"Louise," he repeated, and said no more.

The river, describing a long curve, caressed a distant row of white houses mirrored head downwards in the water. The girl picked daisies and arranged them in a huge rustic sheaf; the man sang at the top of his voice, as lively as a colt just put out to grass.

To the left, a slope planted with vines followed the curve

of the river. Suddenly François stopped and remained motionless with astonishment.

"Oh, look!" he said.

The vineyards had ceased, and all the hillside was now covered with flowering lilac. It was a violet-hued wood, a carpet spread upon the earth, reaching as far as the village two or three kilometres distant.

She too stood spellbound with delight.

"Oh! How lovely!" she murmured.

They crossed a field and ran towards this strange hill which every year supplies all the lilac trundled about Paris on the little barrows of the street sellers.

A narrow path lost itself among the shrubs. They took it, and, coming to a small clearing, sat down there.

Legions of flies murmured above their heads, filling the air with a soft, ceaseless drone. The sun, the fierce sun of an airless day, beat down upon the long slope of blossom, drawing from this flower-forest a powerful scent, great heady gusts of perfume, the exhalation of the flowers.

A church-bell rang in the distance.

Quietly they embraced, then drew each other closer, lying in the grass, conscious of nothing but their kisses. She had closed her eyes and held him in her open arms, clasping him tightly, all thought dismissed, all reason abandoned, every sense utterly suspended in passionate expectation. She gave herself utterly to him, without knowing what she was doing, without even realising that she was delivered into his hands.

She came to herself half mad, as from a dreadful disaster, and began to weep, moaning with grief, hiding her face in her hands.

He tried to console her. But she was anxious to leave, to get back, to go home at once. She walked up and down with desperate strides, ceaselessly repeating:

"My God! My God!"

"Louise," he begged. "Please stay, Louise."

Her cheeks were burning now, and her eyes sunken. As soon as they arrived at the station in Paris, she left him without even bidding him good-bye.

When he met her next day in the omnibus, she seemed to him to have changed, to have grown thinner.

"I must speak to you," she said to him. "We will get off at the boulevard."

When they were alone on the pavement she said :

"We must say good-bye to one another. I cannot see you again after what has happened."

"But why not?" he stammered.

"Because I cannot. I was to blame. I shall not be guilty a second time."

At that he begged and implored her, tortured with desire, maddened with the need to possess her utterly, in the deep abandon of nights of love.

"No, I cannot," she replied obstinately. "No, I cannot."

He grew more and more eager and excited. He promised to marry her.

"No," she said again, and left him.

He did not see her for eight days. He could not meet her, and, as he did not know her address, he thought her lost for ever.

On the evening of the ninth day his door-bell rang. He went to open the door. It was she. She flung herself into his arms and resisted no longer.

For three months she was his mistress. He began to weary of her, when she told him that she was with child. At that he had only one idea left in his head: to break with her at all costs.

Unable to tell her frankly what he meant to do, not knowing how to deal with the situation or what to say, wild with apprehension, and with the fear of the growing child, he made a desperate move. He decamped one night and disappeared.

The blow was so cruel that she made no search for the man who had deserted her in this fashion. She flung herself at her mother's knees and confessed her misfortune to her ; a few months later she gave birth to a son.

The years slipped by. François Tessier grew old, without suffering any change in his manner of life. He led the monotonous and dismal existence of a bureaucrat, without hope or expectation. Every day he rose at the same hour, went down the same streets, walked through the same door past the same hall-porter, entered the same office, sat down on the same seat, and worked at the same task. He was alone in the world, alone by day in the midst of his indifferent colleagues, alone at night in his bachelor lodgings. Every month he saved up a hundred francs for his old age.

Every Sunday he went for a walk along the Champs-Élysées, to watch the world of fashion go by, the carriages and the pretty women.

Next day he would say to his comrades in duress :

"It was a wonderful sight outside the park yesterday."

One Sunday it chanced that he took a new way and went into the Parc Monceau. It was a bright summer morning. Nurses and mothers, seated on the benches at the side of the paths, were watching the children playing in front of them.

Suddenly François Tessier shivered. A woman passed him, holding two children by the hand, a little boy of about ten, and a little girl of four. It was she.

He walked on for another hundred yards, and then sank into a chair, choked with emotion. She had not recognised him. Then he went back, trying to see her again. She was sitting down now. The boy was standing beside her, charmingly decorous, and the little girl was making mud-pies. It was she, it was certainly she. She had the grave demeanour of a lady ; her dress was simple, her bearing full of dignity and assurance.

He watched her from a distance, not daring to come close. The little boy raised his head. François Tessier felt himself trembling. This was his son, past all manner of doubt. He gazed at him, and fancied that he recognised himself as he might look in an old photograph.

He stayed hidden behind a tree, waiting for her to go, so that he might follow.

He did not sleep that night. The thought of the child racked him more than any other. His son! Oh! if he could only know, be sure! But what would he have done?

He had seen her house, he made inquiries, he learnt that she was married to a neighbour, a good man of high moral principles, who had been touched by her misery. Knowing her sin and forgiving it, he had even acknowledged the child, his, François Tessier's child.

Every Sunday he revisited the Parc Monceau. Every Sunday he saw her, and each time the mad, irresistible longing came to him to take his son in his arms, cover him with kisses, and carry him off, steal him.

He suffered terribly in his wretched loneliness, an old bachelor with nothing to love; he suffered a frightful anguish, torn by a fatherly love made up of remorse, longing, jealousy, and that need of small creatures to love which nature has implanted in the secret depths of every human being.

At last he decided to make a desperate effort, and, going up to her one day as she was entering the park, stood in her way, and said, with livid face and quivering lips:

"Don't you recognise me?"

She raised her eyes, looked at him, uttered a scream of fear and horror, and, seizing her two children by the hand, fled, dragging them after her.

He went home to weep.

More months went by. He saw her no more. But he suffered day and night, gnawed and devoured by love for his child.

To embrace his son he would have died, would have committed murder, accomplished any task, braved any danger, attempted any perilous enterprise.

He wrote to her. She did not answer. After twenty letters he realised that he could not hope to move her. Then he took a desperate resolution; ready to receive a pistol bullet in his heart if he failed, he wrote a short note to her husband:

"SIR,—

"My name must be an abhorred one to you. But I am so wretched, so tortured with remorse, that I have no hope except in you.

"I ask only for ten minutes' talk with you.

"Yours," etc.

Next day he received the answer:

"SIR,—

"I shall expect you at five o'clock on Tuesday."

As he mounted the staircase, François Tessier paused on every step, so furious was the beating of his heart. It was a hurrying clamour within his chest, a galloping animal, a dull and violent thudding. He could not breathe without an effort, and clung to the banisters to keep himself from falling.

At the third floor he rang. A servant opened the door.

"Monsieur Flamel?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir. Will you come in?"

He entered a middle-class drawing-room. He was alone, and he waited in agony like a man in the grip of disaster.

A door opened. A man appeared. He was tall, grave, and rather stout, and wore a black frock-coat. He pointed to a chair.

François Tessier sat down, then said in a breathless voice:

"Monsieur . . . Monsieur . . . I don't know if you know my name . . . if you know. . ."

Monsieur Flamel cut him short.

"Do not trouble to explain, Monsieur. I know. My wife has spoken of you."

He had the forthright aspect of a kindly man trying to be severe; and the upstanding dignity of a sober, middle-class citizen.

"You see, Monsieur, it's like this," continued François Tessier. "I am dying of grief, remorse, and shame. All that I long for is that I may once, just once, kiss . . . the child."

Monsieur Flamel rose, went to the fire-place, and rang. The servant appeared.

"Fetch Louis," he said.

She went out. They remained facing one another, silent, having nothing else to say, waiting.

Suddenly a little boy of ten dashed into the room and ran to kiss the man he thought to be his father. But he stopped in confusion when he saw the stranger.

Monsieur Flamel kissed him on the forehead, and then said: "Now, kiss this gentleman, darling."

The child advanced obediently, looking at the stranger.

François Tessier had risen; he let his hat fall and was himself ready to collapse.

Monsieur Flamel had tactfully turned his back and was looking out of the window at the street.

The child waited in great astonishment. He picked up the hat and restored it to the stranger. Then François, taking the little boy in his arms, began to cover his face with furious kisses, upon eyes, cheeks, mouth, and hair.

The child was frightened by the storm of kisses and tried to avoid them, turning away his head, and with his little hands thrust away the man's greedy lips.

Abruptly François Tessier set him down again.

"Good-bye! Good-bye!" he cried.

And he fled like a thief.

CONFESSING

THE NOON SUN POURED FIERCELY DOWN UPON THE FIELDS. They stretched in undulating folds between the clumps of trees that marked each farmhouse; the different crops, ripe rye and yellowing wheat, pale-green oats, dark-green clover, spread a vast striped cloak, soft and rippling, over the naked body of the earth.

In the distance, on the crest of a slope, was an endless line of cows, ranked like soldiers, some lying down, others standing, their large eyes blinking in the burning light, chewing the cud and grazing on a field of clover as broad as a lake.

Two women, mother and daughter, were walking with a swinging step, one behind the other, towards this regiment of cattle. Each carried two zinc pails, slung outwards from the body on a hoop from a cask; at each step the metal sent out a dazzling white flash under the sun that struck full upon it.

The women did not speak. They were on their way to milk the cows. When they arrive, they set down one of their pails and approach the first two cows, making them stand up with a kick in the ribs from wooden-shod feet. The beast rises slowly, first on its forelegs, then with more difficulty raises its large hind quarters, which seem to be weighted down by the enormous udder of livid pendulous flesh.

The two Malivoires, mother and daughter, kneeling beneath the animal's belly, tug with a swift movement of their hands at the swollen teat, which at each squeeze sends a slender jet of milk into the pail. The yellowish froth mounts to the brim, and the women go from cow to cow until they reach the end of the long line.

As soon as they finish milking a beast, they change its position, giving it a fresh patch of grass on which to graze.

Then they start on their way home, more slowly now, weighed down by the load of milk, the mother in front, the daughter behind.

Abruptly the latter halts, sets down her burden, sits down, and begins to cry.

Madame Malivoire, missing the sound of steps behind her, turns round and is quite amazed.

"What's the matter with you?" she said.

Her daughter Céleste, a tall girl with flaming red hair and flaming cheeks, flecked with freckles as though sparks of fire had fallen upon her face one day as she worked in the sun, murmurs, moaning softly, like a beaten child:

"I can't carry the milk any further."

Her mother looked at her suspiciously.

"What's the matter with you?" she repeated.

"It drags too heavy, I can't," replied Céleste, who had collapsed and was lying on the ground between the two pails, hiding her eyes in her apron.

"What's the matter with you, then?" said her mother for the third time. The girl moaned:

"I think there's a baby on the way." And she broke into sobs.

The old woman now in her turn set down her load, so amazed that she could find nothing to say. At last she stammered:

"You . . . you . . . you're going to have a baby, you clod! How can that be?"

The Malivoires were prosperous farmers, wealthy and of a certain position, widely respected, good business folk, of some importance in the district.

"I think I am, all the same," faltered Céleste.

The frightened mother looked at the weeping girl grovelling at her feet. After a few seconds she cried:

"You're going to have a baby! A baby! Where did you get it, you slut?"

Céleste, shaken with emotion, murmured:

"I think it was in Polyte's coach."

The old woman tried to understand, tried to imagine, to realise who could have brought this misfortune upon her daughter. If the lad was well off and of decent position, an arrangement might be come to. The damage could still be repaired. Céleste was not the first to be in the same way, but it was annoying all the same, seeing their position and the way people talked.

"And who was it, you slut?" she repeated.

Céleste, resolved to make a clean breast of it, stammered:

"I think it was Polyte."

At that Madame Malivoire, mad with rage, rushed upon her daughter and began to beat her with such fury that her hat fell off in the effort.

With great blows of the fist she struck her on the head, on the back, all over her body; Céleste, prostrate between the two pails, which afforded her some slight protection, shielded just her face with her hands.

All the cows, disturbed, had stopped grazing and turned round, staring with their great eyes. The last one mooed, stretching out its muzzle towards the women.

After beating her daughter till she was out of breath, Madame Malivoire stopped, exhausted; her spirits reviving a little, she tried to get a thorough understanding of the situation.

"—— Polyte! Lord save us, it's not possible! How could you, with a carrier? You must have lost your wits. He must have played you a trick, the good-for-nothing!"

Céleste, still prostrate, murmured in the dust:

"I didn't pay my fare!"

And the old Norman woman understood.

Every week, on Wednesday and on Saturday, Céleste went to town with the farm produce, poultry, cream, and eggs.

She started at seven with her two huge baskets on her arm, the dairy produce in one, the chickens in the other, and went to the main road to wait for the coach to Yvetot.

She set down her wares and sat in the ditch, while the chickens with their short pointed beaks and the ducks with their broad flat bills thrust their heads between the wicker bars and looked about them with their round, stupid, surprised eyes.

Soon the bus, a sort of yellow box with a black leather cap on the top, came up, jerking and quivering with the trotting of the old white horse.

Polyte the coachman, a big, jolly fellow, stout though still young, and so burnt up by sun and wind, soaked by rain, and coloured with brandy that his face and neck were brick-red, cracked his whip and shouted from the distance :

“Morning, Mam’selle Céleste. In good health, I hope?”

She gave him her baskets, one after the other, which he stowed in the boot; then she got in, lifting her leg high up to reach the step, and exposing a sturdy leg clad in a blue stocking.

Every time Polyte repeated the same joke: “Well, it’s not got any thinner.”

She laughed, thinking this funny.

Then he uttered a “Gee up, old girl!” which started off the thin horse. Then Céleste, reaching for her purse in the depths of her pocket, slowly took out fivepence, threepence for herself and twopence for the baskets, and handed them to Polyte over his shoulder.

He took them, saying :

“Aren’t we going to have our little bit of sport to-day?”

And he laughed heartily, turning round towards her so as to stare at her at his ease.

She found it a big expense, the half-franc for a journey of two miles. And when she had no coppers she felt it still more keenly; it was hard to make up her mind to part with a silver coin.

One day, as she was paying, she asked :

"From a good customer like me you oughtn't to take more than threepence."

He burst out laughing.

"Threepence, my beauty; why, you're worth more than that."

She insisted on the point.

"But you make a good two francs a month out of me."

He whipped up his horse and exclaimed:

"Look here, I'm an obliging fellow! We'll call it quits for a bit of sport."

"What do you mean?" she asked with an air of innocence.

He was so amused that he laughed till he coughed.

"A bit of sport is a bit of sport, damn it; a game for a lad and a lass, a dance for two without music."

She understood, blushed, and declared:

"I don't care for that sort of game, Monsieur Polyte."

But he was in no way abashed, and repeated, with growing merriment:

"You'll come to it some day, my beauty, a bit of sport for a lad and a lass!"

And since that day he had taken to asking her, each time that she paid her fare:

"Aren't we going to have our bit of sport to-day?"

She, too, joked about it by this time, and replied:

"Not to-day, Monsieur Polyte, but Saturday, for certain!"

And amid peals of laughter he answered:

"Saturday, then, my beauty."

But inwardly she calculated that, during the two years the affair had been going on, she had paid Polyte forty-eight whole francs, and in the country forty-eight francs is not a sum which can be picked up on the roadside; she also calculated that in two more years she would have paid nearly a hundred francs.

To such purpose she meditated that, one spring day as they jogged on alone, when he made his customary inquiry: "Aren't we going to have our bit of sport yet?" She replied:

"Yes, if you like, Monsieur Polyte."

He was not at all surprised, and clambered over the back of his seat, murmuring with a complacent air :

"Come along, then. I knew you'd come to it some day."

The old white horse trotted so gently that she seemed to be dancing upon the same spot, deaf to the voice which cried at intervals, from the depths of the vehicle : "Gee up, old girl ! Gee up, then !"

Three months later Céleste discovered that she was going to have a child.

All this she had told her mother in a tearful voice. Pale with fury, the old woman asked :

"Well, what did it cost ?"

"Four months ; that makes eight francs, doesn't it ?" replied Céleste.

At that the peasant woman's fury was utterly unleashed, and, falling once more upon her daughter, she beat her a second time until she was out of breath. Then she rose and said :

"Have you told him about the baby ?"

"No, of course not."

"Why haven't you told him ?"

"Because very likely he'd have made me pay for all the free rides !"

The old woman pondered awhile, then picked up her milk-pails.

"Come on, get up, and try to walk home," she said, and, after a pause, continued :

"And don't tell him as long as he doesn't notice anything, and we'll make six or eight months' fares out of him."

And Céleste, who had risen, still crying, dishevelled and swollen round the eyes, started off again with dragging steps, murmuring :

"Of course I won't say."

THE NECKLACE

SHE WAS ONE OF THOSE PRETTY AND CHARMING GIRLS BORN, as though fate had blundered over her, into a family of artisans. She had no marriage portion, no expectations, no means of getting known, understood, loved, and wedded by a man of wealth and distinction ; and she let herself be married off to a little clerk in the Ministry of Education.

Her tastes were simple because she had never been able to afford any other, but she was as unhappy as though she had married beneath her ; for women have no caste or class, their beauty, grace, and charm serving them for birth or family. Their natural delicacy, their instinctive elegance, their nimbleness of wit, are their only mark of rank, and put the slum girl on a level with the highest lady in the land.

She suffered endlessly, feeling herself born for every delicacy and luxury. She suffered from the poorness of her house, from its mean walls, worn chairs, and ugly curtains. All these things, of which other women of her class would not even have been aware, tormented and insulted her. The sight of the little Breton girl who came to do the work in her little house aroused heart-broken regrets and hopeless dreams in her mind. She imagined silent antechambers, heavy with Oriental tapestries, lit by torches in lofty bronze sockets, with two tall footmen in knee-breeches sleeping in large arm-chairs, overcome by the heavy warmth of the stove. She imagined vast saloons hung with antique silks, exquisite pieces of furniture supporting priceless ornaments, and small, charming, perfumed rooms, created just for little parties of intimate friends, men who were famous and sought after, whose homage roused every other woman's envious longings.

When she sat down for dinner at the round table covered with a three-days-old cloth, opposite her husband, who took the cover off the soup-tureen, exclaiming delightedly : "Aha ! Scotch broth ! What could be better ?" she imagined delicate meals, gleaming silver, tapestries peopling the walls with folk of a past age and strange birds in faery forests ; she imagined delicate food served in marvellous dishes, murmured gallantries, listened to with an inscrutable smile as one trifled with the rosy flesh of trout or wings of asparagus chicken.

She had no clothes, no jewels, nothing. And these were the only things she loved ; she felt that she was made for them. She had longed so eagerly to charm, to be desired, to be wildly attractive and sought after.

She had a rich friend, an old school friend whom she refused to visit, because she suffered so keenly when she returned home. She would weep whole days, with grief, regret, despair, and misery.

One evening her husband came home with an exultant air, holding a large envelope in his hand.

"Here's something for you," he said.

Swiftly she tore the paper and drew out a printed card on which were these words :

"The Minister of Education and Madame Ramponneau request the pleasure of the company of Monsieur and Madame Loisel at the Ministry on the evening of Monday, January the 18th."

Instead of being delighted, as her husband hoped, she flung the invitation petulantly across the table, murmuring :

"What do you want me to do with this ?"

"Why, darling, I thought you'd be pleased. You never go out, and this is a great occasion. I had tremendous trouble to get it. Every one wants one ; it's very select, and very few go to the clerks. You'll see all the really big people there."

She looked at him out of furious eyes, and said impatiently :

"And what do you suppose I am to wear at such an affair?"

He had not thought about it; he stammered :

"Why, the dress you go to the theatre in. It looks very nice, to me. . . ."

He stopped, stupefied and utterly at a loss when he saw that his wife was beginning to cry. Two large tears ran slowly down from the corners of her eyes towards the corners of her mouth.

"What's the matter with you? What's the matter with you?" he faltered.

But with a violent effort she overcame her grief and replied in a calm voice, wiping her wet cheeks :

"Nothing. Only I haven't a dress and so I can't go to this party. Give your invitation to some friend of yours whose wife will be turned out better than I shall."

He was heart-broken.

"Look here, Mathilde," he persisted. "What would be the cost of a suitable dress, which you could use on other occasions as well, something very simple?"

She thought for several seconds, reckoning up prices and also wondering for how large a sum she could ask without bringing upon herself an immediate refusal and an exclamation of horror from the careful-minded clerk.

At last she replied with some hesitation :

"I don't know exactly, but I think I could do it on four hundred francs."

He grew slightly pale, for this was exactly the amount he had been saving for a gun, intending to get a little shooting next summer on the plain of Nanterre with some friends who went lark-shooting there on Sundays.

Nevertheless he said: "Very well. I'll give you four hundred francs. But try and get a really nice dress with the money."

The day of the party drew near, and Madame Loisel seemed sad, uneasy and anxious. Her dress was ready, however. One evening her husband said to her :

"What's the matter with you? You've been very odd for the last three days."

"I'm utterly miserable at not having any jewels, not a single stone, to wear," she replied. "I shall look absolutely no one. I would almost rather not go to the party."

"Wear flowers," he said. "They're very smart at this time of the year. For ten francs you could get two or three gorgeous roses."

She was not convinced.

"No . . . there's nothing so humiliating as looking poor in the middle of a lot of rich women."

"How stupid you are!" exclaimed her husband. "Go and see Madame Forestier and ask her to lend you some jewels. You know her quite well enough for that."

She uttered a cry of delight.

"That's true. I never thought of it."

Next day she went to see her friend and told her her trouble.

Madame Forestier went to her dressing-table, took up a large box, brought it to Madame Loisel, opened it, and said :

"Choose, my dear."

First she saw some bracelets, then a pearl necklace, then a Venetian cross in gold and gems, of exquisite workmanship. She tried the effect of the jewels before the mirror, hesitating, unable to make up her mind to leave them, to give them up. She kept on asking :

"Haven't you anything else?"

"Yes. Look for yourself. I don't know what you would like best."

Suddenly she discovered, in a black satin case, a superb diamond necklace; her heart began to beat covetously. Her hands trembled as she lifted it. She fastened it round her neck, upon her high dress, and remained in ecstasy at sight of herself.

Then, with hesitation, she asked in anguish :

" Could you lend me this, just this alone ? "

" Yes, of course."

She flung herself on her friend's breast, embraced her frenziedly, and went away with her treasure.

The day of the party arrived. Madame Loisel was a success. She was the prettiest woman present, elegant, graceful, smiling, and quite above herself with happiness. All the men stared at her, inquired her name, and asked to be introduced to her. All the Under-Secretaries of State were eager to waltz with her. The Minister noticed her.

She danced madly, ecstatically, drunk with pleasure, with no thought for anything, in the triumph of her beauty, in the pride of her success, in a cloud of happiness made up of this universal homage and admiration, of the desires she had aroused, of the completeness of a victory so dear to her feminine heart.

She left about four o'clock in the morning. Since midnight her husband had been dozing in a deserted little room, in company with three other men whose wives were having a good time.

He threw over her shoulders the garments he had brought for them to go home in, modest everyday clothes, whose poverty clashed with the beauty of the ball-dress. She was conscious of this and was anxious to hurry away, so that she should not be noticed by the other women putting on their costly furs.

Loisel restrained her.

" Wait a little. You'll catch cold in the open. I'm going to fetch a cab."

But she did not listen to him and rapidly descended the staircase. When they were out in the street they could not find a cab ; they began to look for one, shouting at the drivers whom they saw passing in the distance.

They walked down towards the Seine, desperate and shivering. At last they found on the quay one of those old night-prowling carriages which are only to be seen in Paris after dark, as though they were ashamed of their shabbiness in the daylight.

It brought them to their door in the Rue des Martyrs, and sadly they walked up to their own apartment. It was the end, for her. As for him, he was thinking that he must be at the office at ten.

She took off the garments in which she had wrapped her shoulders, so as to see herself in all her glory before the mirror. But suddenly she uttered a cry. The necklace was no longer round her neck!

"What's the matter with you?" asked her husband, already half undressed.

She turned towards him in the utmost distress.

"I . . . I . . . I've no longer got Madame Forestier's necklace. . . ."

He started with astonishment.

"What! . . . Impossible!"

They searched in the folds of her dress, in the folds of the coat, in the pockets, everywhere. They could not find it.

"Are you sure that you still had it on when you came away from the ball?" he asked.

"Yes, I touched it in the hall at the Ministry."

"But if you had lost it in the street, we should have heard it fall."

"Yes. Probably we should. Did you take the number of the cab?"

"No. You didn't notice it, did you?"

"No."

They stared at one another, dumbfounded. At last Loisel put on his clothes again.

"I'll go over all the ground we walked," he said, "and see if I can't find it."

And he went out. She remained in her evening clothes, lacking strength to get into bed, huddled on a chair, without volition or power of thought.

Her husband returned about seven. He had found nothing.

He went to the police station, to the newspapers, to offer a reward, to the cab companies, everywhere that a ray of hope impelled him.

She waited all day long, in the same state of bewilderment at this fearful catastrophe.

Loisel came home at night, his face lined and pale; he had discovered nothing.

"You must write to your friend," he said, "and tell her that you've broken the clasp of her necklace and are getting it mended. That will give us time to look about us."

She wrote at his dictation.

By the end of a week they had lost all hope.

Loisel, who had aged five years, declared:

"We must see about replacing the diamonds."

Next day they took the box which had held the necklace and went to the jewellers whose name was inside. He consulted his books.

"It was not I who sold this necklace, Madame; I must have merely supplied the clasp."

Then they went from jeweller to jeweller, searching for another necklace like the first, consulting their memories, both ill with remorse and anguish of mind.

In a shop at the Palais-Royal they found a string of diamonds which seemed to them exactly like the one they were looking for. It was worth forty thousand francs. They were allowed to have it for thirty-six thousand.

They begged the jeweller not to sell it for three days. And they arranged matters on the understanding that it would be taken back for thirty-four thousand francs, if the first one were found before the end of February.

Loisel possessed eighteen thousand francs left to him by his father. He intended to borrow the rest.

He did borrow it, getting a thousand from one man, five hundred from another, five louis here, three louis there. He gave notes of hand, entered into ruinous agreements, did business with usurers and the whole tribe of money-lenders. He mortgaged the whole remaining years of his existence, risked his signature without even knowing if he could honour it, and, appalled at the agonising face of the future, at the black misery about to fall upon him, at the prospect of every possible physical privation and moral torture, he went to get the new necklace and put down upon the jeweller's counter thirty-six thousand francs.

When Madame Loisel took back the necklace to Madame Forestier, the latter said to her in a chilly voice :

"You ought to have brought it back sooner ; I might have needed it."

She did not, as her friend had feared, open the case. If she had noticed the substitution, what would she have thought ? What would she have said ? Would she not have taken her for a thief ?

Madame Loisel came to know the ghastly life of abject poverty. From the very first she played her part heroically. This fearful debt must be paid off. She would pay it. The servant was dismissed. They changed their flat ; they took a garret under the roof.

She came to know the heavy work of the house, the hateful duties of the kitchen. She washed the plates, wearing out her pink nails on the coarse pottery and the bottoms of pans. She washed the dirty linen, the shirts and dish-cloths, and hung them out to dry on a string ; every morning she took the dustbin down into the street and carried up the water, stopping on each landing to get her breath. And, clad like a poor woman, she went to the fruiterer, to the grocer, to the butcher, a basket

on her arm, haggling, insulted, fighting for every wretched halfpenny of her money.

Every month notes had to be paid off, others renewed, time gained.

Her husband worked in the evenings at putting straight a merchant's accounts, and often at night he did copying at two-pence-halfpenny a page.

And this life lasted ten years.

At the end of ten years everything was paid off, everything, the usurer's charges and the accumulation of superimposed interest.

Madame Loisel looked old now. She had become like all the other strong, hard, coarse women of poor households. Her hair was badly done, her skirts were awry, her hands were red. She spoke in a shrill voice, and the water slopped all over the floor when she scrubbed it. But sometimes, when her husband was at the office, she sat down by the window and thought of that evening long ago, of the ball at which she had been so beautiful and so much admired.

What would have happened if she had never lost those jewels. Who knows? Who knows? How strange life is, how fickle! How little is needed to ruin or to save!

One Sunday, as she had gone for a walk along the Champs-Élysées to freshen herself after the labours of the week, she caught sight suddenly of a woman who was taking a child out for a walk. It was Madame Forestier, still young, still beautiful, still attractive.

Madame Loisel was conscious of some emotion. Should she speak to her? Yes, certainly. And now that she had paid, she would tell her all. Why not?

She went up to her.

"Good morning, Jeanne."

The other did not recognise her, and was surprised at being thus familiarly addressed by a poor woman.

"But . . . Madame . . ." she stammered. "I don't know . . . you must be making a mistake."

"No . . . I am Mathilde Loisel."

Her friend uttered a cry.

"Oh! . . . my poor Mathilde, how you have changed! . . ."

"Yes, I've had some hard times since I saw you last; and many sorrows . . . and all on your account."

"On my account! . . . How was that?"

"You remember the diamond necklace you lent me for the ball at the Ministry?"

"Yes. Well?"

"Well, I lost it."

"How could you? Why, you brought it back."

"I brought you another one just like it. And for the last ten years we have been paying for it. You realise it wasn't easy for us; we had no money. . . . Well, it's paid for at last, and I'm glad indeed."

Madame Forestier had halted.

"You say you bought a diamond necklace to replace mine?"

"Yes. You hadn't noticed it? They were very much alike."

And she smiled in proud and innocent happiness.

Madame Forestier, deeply moved, took her two hands.

"Oh, my poor Mathilde! But mine was imitation. It was worth at the very most five hundred francs! . . ."

HAPPINESS

IT WAS TEA-TIME, JUST BEFORE THE LAMPS WERE BROUGHT IN. The villa overlooked the sea; the vanished sun had left the sky rose-tipped in its passing, and powdered with golden dust; and the Mediterranean, without ripple or faintest movement, smooth, still gleaming with the light of the dying day, spread out a vast shield of burnished metal.

Far to the right, the jagged mountains lifted their black, sharp-cut bulk against the dim purple of the West.

They were speaking of love, retelling an ancient tale, saying over again things already said many, many times before. The soft, melancholy dusk pressed upon their speech, so that a feeling of tenderness welled up in their hearts, and the word "love," constantly repeated, now in a man's strong voice, now in the high, clear tones of a woman, seemed to fill the little room, flitting about it like a bird, hovering like a spirit over them.

Can one love for years without end?

Yes, claimed some.

No, declared others.

They drew a distinction between various cases, made clear the qualities that divided one from another, quoted examples; and all, both men and women, filled with rushing, disquieting memories which they could not reveal and which hovered on their lips, seemed profoundly moved; they spoke of this commonplace yet supreme thing, this mysterious concord between two beings, with the deepest emotion and burning interest.

Suddenly one among them, whose eyes were fixed on the distant scene, exclaimed:

“ Oh ! Look ! What’s that, over there ? ”

Across the sea, on the rim of haze, rose a huge, grey, shapeless mass.

The women had risen and were staring uncomprehendingly at this amazing object, which none of them had ever seen before.

“ It’s Corsica,” said someone. “ It can be seen two or three times a year under exceptional atmospheric conditions, when the air is so perfectly clear as not to conceal it with those mists of water-vapour in which distant prospects are always wrapped.”

They could distinguish vaguely the mountain peaks, and fancied that they could see the snow on the summits. And every one was surprised, disturbed, almost frightened at this abrupt appearance of a world, at this phantom risen from the sea. Such perilous visions had they, perchance, who set out like Columbus across strange seas.

Then an old gentleman, who had not spoken, remarked :

“ Oddly enough, in that island which has just swum into our sight—at the very moment when it would give force to what we have been saying and awaken one of my strangest memories—I came across a perfect instance of faithful love, miraculously happy love.

“ Five years ago I made a tour in Corsica. That wild island is farther away from us, and less known to us, than America, although it is sometimes to be seen from the coasts of France, even as to-day.

“ Imagine a world still in chaos, a maelstrom of mountains separated by narrow ravines down which foaming torrents rush ; not a single level space, but only immense billows of granite and gigantic undulations in the ground, covered with thickets or with lofty forests of chestnut and pine. It is virgin soil, uncultivated, deserted, although an occasional village may be descried, like a pile of rocks perched on the top of a mountain. There is no culture, no industry, no art. Never does

one meet with a piece of carved wood, a block of sculptured stone, with any reminder of hereditary taste, rudimentary or refined, for gracious and beautiful things. That is the most striking thing in this superb, harsh country: its inherited indifference to that search for magical loveliness which is called art.

"Italy, where every palace, full of masterpieces, is itself a masterpiece, where marble, wood, bronze, iron, in fact all metals and stones, bear witness to the genius of man, where the tiniest heirlooms in old houses reveal a divine care for beauty, is to each one of us a sacred and beloved land, because she displays and proves to us the strong impulse, the grandeur, the power, and the triumph of the creative intelligence.

"Facing her, wild Corsica has remained just as she was in her earliest days. There man lives in his rude house, indifferent to all that does not affect his mere existence or his family quarrels. He has survived with the defects and qualities of all uncivilised races, violent, strong to hate, instinctively blood-thirsty, but also hospitable, generous, full of true piety, simple-hearted, opening his door to the passer-by and bestowing a loyal friendship in return for the smallest token of sympathy.

"For a month I had been wandering over this magnificent island, feeling as though I were at the end of the world. There are no inns, no taverns, no roads. Mule paths lead to the villages that cling to the flanks of the mountains and overlook the twisting gulfs from whose depths the heavy, muffled, deep roar of the torrent rises ceaselessly in the silence of evening. The traveller knocks at the house doors and asks for shelter for the night and food until next day. He sits down at the humble table and sleeps beneath the humble roof, and in the morning shakes the outstretched hand of his host, who leads him to the edge of the village.

"One evening, after walking for ten hours, I came to a little house standing by itself in the depths of a narrow valley that fell into the sea a league farther on. The two steep slopes

of the hillside, covered with thickets, boulders, and tall trees, were like two gloomy walls enclosing this unutterably mournful abyss.

"Round the hovel were a few vines, a small garden, and, further on, some large chestnut-trees; enough, actually, for a bare existence, a fortune in that poor country.

"The woman who opened the door was old, hard-featured, and clean, which was unusual. The man, seated on a cane-chair, got up to greet me and then sat down without saying a word.

" 'Please excuse him,' said his wife to me. 'He's deaf now. He's eighty-two.'

"She spoke perfect French. I was surprised.

" 'You are not Corsicans?' I asked her.

" 'No,' she replied, 'we come from the mainland. But we have lived here for fifty years.'

"A feeling of anguish and terror overwhelmed me at the thought of the fifty years that had rolled by in this dark hole, so far from towns and the life of men. An old shepherd came in, and we began to eat the only course of the dinner, a thick soup in which potatoes, bacon, and cabbage were all boiled together.

"When the short meal was over, I went out and sat before the door, my heart oppressed with the melancholy of that sombre landscape, in the grip of that feeling of wretchedness which sometimes lays hold on the traveller, on sad evenings, in desolate places. It seems as though all things were coming to an end, life itself, and the universe. The dreadful misery of life is revealed in one blinding flash, and the isolation of all things, the nothingness of all things, and the black loneliness of our hearts which soothe and deceive themselves with dreams until the coming of death itself.

"The old woman joined me, and tormented by the curiosity which lives on in the hearts of even the most resigned of mortals, said to me:

" ' So you come from France ? ' "

" ' Yes, I am travelling for pleasure. ' "

" ' You are from Paris, perhaps ? ' "

" ' No, I come from Nancy. ' "

" At that it seemed to me that an extraordinary excitement was agitating her. How I saw this, or rather felt it, I do not know.

" ' You are from Nancy ? ' she repeated slowly.

" The husband appeared in the doorway, impassive, as are all deaf people.

" ' It does not matter, ' she continued. ' He cannot hear. ' "

" Then, after a few seconds :

" ' Then you know people in Nancy ? ' "

" ' Why, yes, almost everybody. ' "

" ' The Sainte-Allaize family ? ' "

" ' Yes, very well ; they were friends of my father's. ' "

" ' What is your name ? ' "

" I told her. She stared intently at me, then said in that soft voice evoked by wakening memories :

" ' Yes, yes, I remember quite well. And the Brisenaves, what has become of them ? ' "

" ' They are all dead. ' "

" ' Ah ! And the Sirmonts, do you know them ? ' "

" ' Yes, the youngest is a General. ' "

" At that she replied, shaking with excitement, with anguish, with I know not what confused powerful and intimate emotion, with I know not how pressing a need to confess, to tell everything, to speak of things she had until this moment kept locked in the secret places of her heart, and of the people whose name troubled the very depths of her soul :

" ' Yes, Henri de Sirmont. I know him well. He is my brother. ' "

" I lifted my eyes to her, quite dumbfounded with surprise. And suddenly I remembered.

" It had been a great scandal, long ago, in aristocratic Lor-

rairie. As a young girl, beautiful, wealthy, Suzanne de Sirmont had run off with a non-commissioned officer in the hussar regiment of which her father was commander.

"He was a handsome lad; his parents were peasants, but he wore the blue dolman with a gallant air, this soldier who seduced his colonel's daughter. Doubtless she had seen him, noticed him, fallen in love with him as she watched the squadrons march past. But how had she spoken to him, how had they been able to meet and come to an understanding? How had she dared to make him realise that she loved him? This no one ever knew.

"Nothing had been guessed or foreseen. One evening, when the soldier had just completed his term of service, he disappeared with her. A search was made, but they were not found. No news of them was heard, and she was thought of as dead.

"And thus I had found her in this sinister valley.

"Then in my turn I answered:

"'Yes, I remember well. You are Mademoiselle Suzanne.'

"She nodded 'yes.' Tears poured from her eyes. Then, glancing towards the old man, standing motionless on the threshold of his dwelling, she said to me:

"'That is he.'

"And I realised that she still loved him, still saw him with eyes blinded by love.

"'But at least you have been happy?' I asked.

"She answered, in a voice that came from her heart:

"'Oh, yes, very happy. He has made me very happy. I have never had any regrets.'

"I gazed at her, a little sad, surprised, marvelling at the power of love! This rich girl had followed this man, this peasant. She had stooped to a life without charm, luxury, or refinement of any sort, she had accustomed herself to an entirely simple existence. And she still loved him. She had become the wife of a country clodhopper, with a bonnet and a canvas

skirt. She sat on a cane-bottomed chair, she ate broth made of potatoes, cabbage, and bacon, out of an earthen platter set on a deal table. She slept on straw at his side.

"She had never a thought for anything but him. She had regretted neither jewels, nor fine clothes, nor fashion, nor the comfort of arm-chairs, nor the perfumed warmth of tapestry-hung rooms, nor the softness of down whereon the body sinks to rest. She had never needed anything but him ; so only that he was there, she wanted nothing.

"In early youth she had forsaken life and the world and those who had loved and nurtured her. She had come, alone with him, to this wild ravine. And he had been everything to her, all that a woman desires, all that she dreams of, all that she ceaselessly awaits, all for which she never ceases to hope." He had filled her existence with happiness from its beginning to its close.

"She could not have been happier.

"And all night long, as I listened to the hoarse breathing of the old soldier lying on his pallet beside the woman who had followed him so far, I thought of this strange and simple adventure, of her happiness, so complete, built of so little.

"I left next morning, after shaking hands with the old couple."

The teller of the tale was silent. A woman said :

"All the same, her ideal was too easy of attainment, her needs too primitive, her demands on life too simple. She must have been a stupid girl."

Another woman said slowly :

"What does it matter ? She was happy."

In the distance, on the rim of the world, Corsica receded into the night, sinking slowly back into the sea, withdrawing the vast shadow that had appeared as though itself would tell the story of the two humble lovers sheltered by its shores.

THE OLD MAN

THE WARM AUTUMN SUNLIGHT FELL ACROSS THE FARMYARD through the tall beeches at the roadside. Under the turf cropped by the cows, the earth was soft and moist with recent rain, and sank underfoot with a sound of sucked-in water; the apple-trees laden with apples strewed the dark-green herbage with pale-green fruit.

Four young heifers were grazing, tethered in a line; from time to time they lowed towards the house; cocks and hens lent colour and movement to the dungheap in front of the cowshed, running round, cackling noisily, scratching in the dust, while the two cocks crowed without ceasing, looking for worms for their hens, and calling to them with lively clucks.

The wooden gate opened; a man came in, aged perhaps forty, but looking sixty, wrinkled and bent, walking with long strides, weighed down by heavy sabots filled with straw. Arms of abnormal length hung down by the side of his body. As he drew near the farmhouse, a yellow cur, tied to the foot of an enormous pear-tree, beside a barrel which served as his kennel, wagged his tail, and began to bark joyously.

"Down, Finot!" cried the man.

The dog was silent.

A peasant woman came out of the house. Her broad, flat, bony body was plainly visible through a tight-fitting woollen jersey. A short grey skirt reached half-way down her legs, which were hidden in blue stockings; she too wore sabots filled with straw. A yellowing white bonnet covered the sparse hair that clung round her skull, and her face, brown, thin, ugly, toothless, bore the savage and brutalised expression found often in the faces of peasants.

"How is he?" asked the man.

"Parson says it's the end," replied the woman; "he won't last through the night."

The two of them went into the house.

After passing through the kitchen, they entered a low, dark room, faintly lit by a window, in front of which hung a rag of Norman chintz. Huge beams in the ceiling, brown with age, dark and smoke-begrimed, ran across the room from one side to the other, carrying the light floor of the loft, where crowds of rats ran about both by day and by night.

The earthen floor, damp and uneven, had a greasy look; at the far end of the room the bed was a dim white patch. A hoarse, regular sound, a harsh, rattling, and whistling breath, with a gurgling note like that made by a broken pump, came from the darkened couch, where an old man lay dying: the woman's father.

The man and the woman came up and stared at the dying man with their calm, patient eyes.

"This time, it's the end," said the son-in-law; "he won't even last till nightfall."

"He's been gurgling like that since midday," answered his wife.

Then they were silent. Her father's eyes were closed, his face was the colour of earth, so dry that it looked as though carved of wood. Between his half-open lips issued a laboured, clamorous breathing, and at every breath the grey calico sheet over his chest heaved and fell.

After a long silence the son-in-law declared:

"There's nothing to do but leave him to snuff out. There's nothing we can do. But it's annoying all the same, because of the colzas; now the weather's good, I'll have to transplant them to-morrow."

His wife seemed uneasy at this idea. She pondered for some moments, then said:

"Seeing that he's going to die, we won't bury him before Saturday; that will leave you to-morrow for the colza."

The peasant meditated.

"Yes," he said, "but then to-morrow I'll have to bid the guests for the funeral; it'll take me a good five or six hours to go and see every one from Tourville to Manetot."

The woman, after pondering for two or three minutes, declared:

"It's barely three, so you could start going round to-night and go all over Tourville way. You may as well say he's dead, seeing that he can't last through the afternoon."

For a few moments the man remained in doubt, pondering over the consequences and the advantages of the idea.

"Very well, I'll go," he said at last.

He made as though to go out, then came back, and said, after a brief hesitation:

"Seeing that you've no work on hand, shake down some cooking-apples, and then you might make four dozen dumplings for the people that will be coming to the funeral; they'll want cheering up. Light the range with the faggot under the shed by the winepress. It's dry."

He left the room, went back into the kitchen, opened the cupboard, took out a six-pound loaf, carefully cut off a slice, gathered the crumbs fallen on to the shelf in the hollow of his hand, and crammed them into his mouth, in order to waste nothing. Then on the tip of his knife he picked up a bit of salt butter from the bottom of a brown earthenware pot and spread it on his bread, which he began to eat, slowly, as he did everything.

He went back across the yard, quieted the dog, who began to bark again, went out on to the road which ran alongside his ditch, and departed in the direction of Tourville.

Left alone, the woman set about her task. She took the lid off the flour-bin and prepared the paste for the dumplings.

For a long time she worked it, turning it over and over, kneading it, squeezing it, and beating it. Then she made a large ball of it, yellowish-white in colour, and left it on the corner of the table.

Then she went to get the apples, and, to avoid injuring the tree with a stick, she climbed into it with the aid of a stool. She chose the fruit with care, taking only the ripest, and heaped them in her apron.

A voice called from the road :

"Hey there ! Madame Chicot !"

She turned round. It was a neighbour, Master Osime Favet, the mayor, on his way to manure his fields, seated on the manure-cart, with his legs dangling over the side. She turned round and replied :

"What can I do for you, Master Osime ?"

"How's your father getting on ?"

"He's practically gone," she shouted. "The funeral's on Saturday at seven, seeing as we're in a hurry to do the colza."

"Right," replied the neighbour. "Good luck to you ! Are you well ?"

"Thank you, yes," she replied to his polite inquiry. "And you too ?"

Then she went on picking her apples.

As soon as she came in, she went to her father, expecting to find him dead. But from the door she could hear his noisy, monotonous death-rattle, and to save time decided that it was useless to go to his bedside. She began to make the dumplings.

She wrapped the apples, one by one, in a thin leaf of paste, then lined them up along the edge of the table. When she had made forty-eight, arranged in dozens one in front of the other, she began to think of getting supper ready, and hung her pot over the fire, to cook the potatoes ; for she had reflected that it was useless to light the range that day, having still the whole of the next day in which to complete her preparations for the funeral.

Her husband returned about five o'clock. As soon as he had crossed the threshold he inquired :

"Is it over yet?"

"Not yet," she replied. "The gurgling's still going on."

They went to the bed. The old man was in exactly the same condition. His raucous breathing, regular as the working of a clock, had become neither quicker nor slower. It came from second to second, with slight variations in the pitch, determined by the passage of the air as it entered and left his chest.

His son-in-law stared at him, then said :

"He'll go out when we're not thinking of it, like a candle."

They went back to the kitchen, and began their supper in silence. When they had swallowed the soup, they ate a slice of bread and butter as well ; then, as soon as the plates were washed, they went back to the dying man's room.

The woman, holding a small lamp with a smoky wick, passed it in front of her father's face. If he had not been breathing he would certainly have been taken for dead.

The bed belonging to the two peasants was hidden at the other end of the room, in a sort of recess. They got into bed without speaking a word, extinguished the light, and closed their eyes ; soon two uneven snores, one deep, the other shriller, accompanied the uninterrupted rattle of the dying man.

The rats ran to and fro in the loft.

The husband awoke with the first pale glimmer of dawn. His father-in-law was still alive. He shook his wife, uneasy at the old man's resistance.

"I say, Phémie, he won't finish it off. What would you do about it?"

He knew her to be of good counsel.

"He won't get through the day, for certain," she replied.

"There's nothing to be afraid of. And then the mayor won't stand in the way of the burial to-morrow just the same, seeing

what he did for old Father Rénard, who died just at sowing-time."

He was convinced by the voice of reason, and went off to the fields.

His wife cooked the dumplings, and then finished all the work of the farmhouse.

At midday, the old man was not dead. The day-labourers hired for the transplanting of the colza came in a group to look at the aged man who was so reluctant to take his leave. Each said his say, then went off again to the fields.

At six, when they returned from work, her father was still breathing. His son-in-law at last became alarmed.

"What's to do now, Phémie?"

She had no more idea than he what was best to do. They went to find the mayor. He promised that he would shut his eyes and authorise the burial on the next day. The officer of health, whom they went to see, also undertook, as a favour to Master Chicot, to antedate the death certificate. The man and the woman went home reassured.

They went to bed and slept as on the night before, mingling their sonorous breathing with the fainter breathing of the old man.

When they awoke, he was not dead.

At that they were overwhelmed. They remained standing at the father's bedside, looking at him with distrust, as though he had meant to play a shabby trick on them, to deceive and annoy them for his own amusement; above all, they grudged him the time he was making them waste.

"What are we to do?" asked the son-in-law.

She had no idea, and answered:

"It's vexing, it is."

They could not now put off the guests, who would be arriving at any moment. They decided to wait for them and explain the situation.

About ten to seven the first guests appeared. The women

dressed in black, their heads wrapped in large veils, came in with a melancholy air. The men, ill at ease in their cloth coats, advanced more slowly, two and two, talking business.

Maitre Chicot and his wife, dismayed, received them with distressed explanations; as they accosted the first group of guests, both of them burst into sudden premeditated and simultaneous sobs. They explained their story, recounted their embarrassment, offered chairs, ran to and fro, made excuses, tried to prove that anybody would have acted in the same way, talking incessantly, suddenly became so talkative that they gave no one a chance to reply.

They went from one to the next.

"We'd never ha' thought it; it's not to be believed he could ha' lasted like this!"

The bewildered guests, a little disappointed, like people who have been robbed of a long-expected ceremony, did not know what to do, and remained seated or standing. Some were anxious to go. Maitre Chicot restrained them.

"We'll break a bit of food together all the same. We've made some dumplings; better make the best of the chance."

Faces brightened at the thought. The guests began to talk in low voices. Gradually the yard filled; the first-comers were telling the news to the new arrivals. They whispered together; every one was cheered at the thought of the dumplings.

The women went in to see the dying man. They crossed themselves at the bedside, stammered a prayer, and came out again. The men, less eager for the spectacle, threw a single glance through the window, which had been set ajar.

Madame Chicot recounted the death agony.

"For two days now he's been like that, neither more nor less, neither higher nor lower. Isn't it just like a pump run dry?"

When everybody had seen the dying man, their thoughts were turned towards the collation; but as the guests were

too numerous for the kitchen to hold, the table was carried out in front of the door. The four dozen dumplings, golden and appetising, attracted all eyes, set out in two large dishes. Every one reached forward to take one, fearing that there were not enough. But four were left over.

Maitre Chicot, his mouth full, declared :

"If the old man could see us, it'd be a rare grief to him ; he was rare and fond of them in his time."

"He'll never eat any more now," said a fat, jovial peasant.

"We all come to it in the end."

This reflection, far from saddening the guests, appeared to cheer them up. At the moment it had come to them to eat the dumplings.

Madame Chicot, heart-broken at the expense, ran ceaselessly to and from the cellar to fetch cider. The jugs came up and were emptied one after another. Every one was laughing now, talking loudly, beginning to shout, as people will shout at meals.

Suddenly an old peasant woman, who had remained near the dying man, held there by a greedy terror of the thing which was so soon to come to herself, appeared at the window and shouted in a shrill voice :

"He's gone ! He's gone !"

Every one was silent. The women rose quickly, to go and see.

He really was dead. The rattle had ceased. The men looked at one another with downcast eyes. The old black-guard had chosen his time ill.

The Chicots were no longer crying. It was all over ; they were calm. They kept on saying :

"We knew it couldn't last. If only he could have made up his mind last night, we shouldn't have had all this bother."

Never mind, it was all over. They would bury him on Monday, that was all, and would eat more dumplings for the occasion.

The guests departed, talking of the affair, pleased all the same at having seen it, and also at having had a bite to eat.

And when the man and his wife were by themselves, face to face, she said, with her face contracted with anguish :

“ All the same, I shall have to make four dozen more dumplings. If only he could have made up his mind last night ! ”

And her husband, more resigned, replied :

“ You won’t have to do it every day.”

A COWARD

SOCIETY CALLED HIM "HANDSOME SIGNOLES." HIS NAME was Viscount Gontran-Joseph de Signoles.

An orphan, and possessed of an adequate income, he cut a dash, as the saying is. He had a good figure and a good carriage, a sufficient flow of words to pass for wit, a certain natural grace, an air of nobility and pride, a gallant moustachie and an eloquent eye, attributes which women like.

He was in demand in drawing-rooms, sought after for *valse*s, and in men he inspired that smiling hostility which is reserved for vital and attractive rivals. He had been suspected of several love-affairs of a sort calculated to create a good opinion of a youngster. He lived a happy, care-free life, in the most complete well-being of body and mind. He was known to be a fine swordsman and a still finer shot with the pistol.

"When I come to fight a duel," he would say, "I shall choose pistols. With that weapon, I'm sure of killing my man."

One evening, he went to the theatre with two ladies, quite young, friends of his, whose husbands were also of the party, and after the performance he invited them to take ices at Tortoni's.

They had been sitting there for a few minutes when he noticed a gentleman at a neighbouring table staring obstinately at one of the ladies of the party. She seemed embarrassed and ill at ease, and bent her head. At last she said to her husband :

"There's a man staring at me. I don't know him; do you?"

The husband, who had seen nothing, raised his eyes, but declared :

"No, not in the least."

Half smiling, half in anger, she replied :

"It's very annoying ; the creature's spoiling my ice."

Her husband shrugged his shoulders.

"Deuce take him, don't appear to notice it. If we had to deal with all the discourteous people one meets, we'd never have done with them."

But the Viscount had risen abruptly. He could not permit this stranger to spoil an ice of his giving. It was to him that the insult was addressed, since it was at his invitation and on his account that his friends had come to the café. The affair was no business of anyone but himself.

He went up to the man and said :

"You have a way of looking at those ladies, sir, which I cannot stomach. Please be so good as to set a limit to your persistence."

"You hold your tongue," replied the other.

"Take care, sir," retorted the Viscount, clenching his teeth ; "you'll force me to overstep the bounds of common politeness."

The gentleman replied with a single word, a vile word which rang across the café from one end to the other, and, like the release of a spring, jerked every person present into an abrupt movement. All those with their backs towards him turned round, all the rest raised their heads ; three waiters spun round on their heels like tops ; the two ladies behind the counter started, then the whole upper half of their bodies twisted round, as though they were a couple of automata worked by the same handle.

There was a profound silence. Then suddenly a sharp noise resounded in the air. The Viscount had boxed his adversary's ears. Every one rose to intervene. Cards were exchanged.

Back in his home, the Viscount walked for several minutes up and down his room with long quick strides. He was too excited to think. A solitary idea dominated his mind: "a duel"; but as yet the idea stirred in him no emotion of any kind. He had done what he was compelled to do; he had shown himself to be what he ought to be. People would talk of it, would approve of him, congratulate him. He repeated aloud, speaking as a man speaks in severe mental distress:

"What a hound the fellow is!"

Then he sat down and began to reflect. In the morning he must find seconds. Whom should he choose? He searched his mind for the most important and celebrated names of his acquaintance. At last he decided on the Marquis de la Tour-Noire and Colonel Bourdin, an aristocrat and a soldier; they would do excellently. Their names would look well in the papers. He realised that he was thirsty, and drank three glasses of water one after the other; then he began to walk up and down again. He felt full of energy. If he played the gallant, showed himself determined, insisted on the most strict and dangerous arrangements, demanded a serious duel, a thoroughly serious duel, a positively terrible duel, his adversary would probably retire and apologise.

He took up once more the card which he had taken from his pocket and thrown down upon the table, and read it again as he had read it before, in the café, at a glance, and in the cab, by the light of each gas-lamp, on his way home.

"Georges Lamil, 51 rue Moncey." Nothing more.

He examined the grouped letters; they seemed to him mysterious, full of confused meaning. Georges Lamil? Who was this man? What did he do? Why had he looked at the woman in that way? Was it not revolting that a stranger, an unknown man, could thus disturb a man's life, without warning, just because he chose to fix his insolent eyes upon a woman? Again the Viscount repeated aloud:

"What a hound!"

Then he remained standing stock-still, lost in thought, his eyes still fixed upon the card. A fury against this scrap of paper awoke in him, a fury of hatred in which was mingled a queer sensation of uneasiness. This sort of thing was so stupid ! He took up an open knife which lay close at hand and thrust it through the middle of the printed name, as though he had stabbed a man.

So he must fight. Should he choose swords or pistols ?—for he regarded himself as the insulted party. With swords there would be less risk, but with pistols there was a chance that his adversary might withdraw. It is very rare that a duel with swords is fatal, for mutual prudence is apt to restrain combatants from engaging at sufficiently close quarters for a point to penetrate deeply. With pistols he ran a grave risk of death ; but he might also extricate himself from the affair with all the honours of the situation and without actually coming to a meeting.

“ I must be firm,” he said. “ He will take fright.”

The sound of his voice set him trembling, and he looked round. He felt very nervous. He drank another glass of water, then began to undress for bed.

As soon as he was in bed, he blew out the light and closed his eyes.

“ I’ve the whole of to-morrow,” he thought, “ in which to set my affairs in order. I’d better sleep now, so that I shall be quite calm.”

He was very warm in the blankets, but he could not manage to compose himself to sleep. He turned this way and that, lay for five minutes upon his back, turned on to his left side, then rolled over on to his right.

He was still thirsty. He got up to get a drink. A feeling of uneasiness crept over him :

“ Is it possible that I’m afraid ? ”

Why did his heart beat madly at each familiar sound in his room ? When the clock was about to strike, the faint squeak

of the rising spring made him start; so shaken he was that for several seconds afterwards he had to open his mouth to get his breath.

He began to reason with himself on the possibility of his being afraid.

"Shall I be afraid?"

No, of course he would not be afraid, since he was resolved to see the matter through, and had duly made up his mind to fight and not to tremble. But he felt so profoundly distressed that he wondered:

"Can a man be afraid in spite of himself?"

He was attacked by this doubt, this uneasiness, this terror; suppose a force more powerful than himself, masterful, irresistible, overcame him, what would happen? Yes, what might not happen? Assuredly he would go to the place of the meeting, since he was quite ready to go. But supposing he trembled? Supposing he fainted? He thought of the scene, of his reputation, his good name.

There came upon him a strange need to get up and look at himself in the mirror. He relit his candle. When he saw his face reflected in the polished glass, he scarcely recognised it, it seemed to him as though he had never yet seen himself. His eyes looked to him enormous; and he was pale; yes, without doubt he was pale, very pale.

He remained standing in front of the mirror. He put out his tongue, as though to ascertain the state of his health, and abruptly the thought struck him like a bullet:

"The day after to-morrow, at this very hour, I may be dead."

His heart began again its furious beating.

"The day after to-morrow, at this very hour, I may be dead. This person facing me, this me I see in the mirror, will be no more. Why, here I am, I look at myself, I feel myself alive, and in twenty-four hours I shall be lying in that bed, dead, my eyes closed, cold, inanimate, vanished."

He turned back towards the bed, and distinctly saw himself lying on his back in the very sheets he had just left. He had the hollow face of a corpse, his hands had the slackness of hands that will never make another movement.

At that he was afraid of his bed, and, to get rid of the sight of it, went into the smoking-room. Mechanically he picked up a cigar, lit it, and began to walk up and down again. He was cold ; he went to the bell to wake his valet ; but he stopped, even as he raised his hand to the rope.

"He will see that I am afraid."

He did not ring ; he lit the fire. His hands shook a little, with a nervous tremor, whenever they touched anything. His brain whirled, his troubled thoughts became elusive, transitory, and gloomy ; his mind suffered all the effects of intoxication, as though he were actually drunk.

Over and over again he thought :

"What shall I do ? What is to become of me ?"

His whole body trembled, seized with a jerky shuddering ; he got up and, going to the window, drew back the curtains.

Dawn was at hand, a summer dawn. The rosy sky touched the town, its roofs and walls, with its own hue. A broad descending ray, like the caress of the rising sun, enveloped the awakened world ; and with the light, hope—a gay, swift, fierce hope—filled the Viscount's heart ! Was he mad, that he had allowed himself to be struck down by fear, before anything was settled even, before his seconds had seen those of this Georges Lamil, before he knew whether he was going to fight ?

He washed, dressed, and walked out with a firm step.

He repeated to himself, as he walked :

"I must be energetic, very energetic. I must prove that I am not afraid."

His seconds, the Marquis and the Colonel, placed themselves at his disposal, and after hearty handshakes discussed the conditions.

"You are anxious for a serious duel?" asked the Colonel.

"Yes, a very serious one," replied the Viscount.

"You still insist on pistols?" said the Marquis.

"Yes."

"You will leave us free to arrange the rest?"

In a dry, jerky voice the Viscount stated:

"Twenty paces; at the signal, raising the arm, and not lowering it. Exchange of shots till one is seriously wounded."

"They are excellent conditions," declared the Colonel in a tone of satisfaction. "You shoot well, you have every chance."

They departed. The Viscount went home to wait for them. His agitation, momentarily quietened, was now growing minute by minute. He felt a strange shivering, a ceaseless vibration, down his arms, down his legs, in his chest; he could not keep still in one place, neither seated nor standing. There was not the least moistening of saliva in his mouth, and at every instant he made a violent movement of his tongue, as though to prevent it sticking to his palate.

He was eager to have breakfast, but could not eat. Then the idea came to him to drink in order to give himself courage, and he sent for a decanter of rum, of which he swallowed six liqueur glasses full one after the other.

A burning warmth flooded through his body, followed immediately by a sudden dizziness of the mind and spirit.

"Now I know what to do," he thought. "Now it is all right."

But by the end of an hour he had emptied the decanter, and his state of agitation had once more become intolerable. He was conscious of a wild need to roll on the ground, to scream, to bite. Night was falling.

The ringing of a bell gave him such a shock that he had not strength to rise and welcome his seconds.

He did not even dare to speak to them, to say "Good evening" to them, to utter a single word, for fear they guessed the whole thing by the alteration in his voice.

"Everything is arranged in accordance with the conditions you fixed," observed the Colonel. "At first your adversary claimed the privileges of the insulted party, but he yielded almost at once, and has accepted everything. His seconds are two military men."

"Thank you," said the Viscount.

"Pardon us," interposed the Marquis, "if we merely come in and leave again immediately, but we have a thousand things to see to. We must have a good doctor, since the combat is not to end until a serious wound is inflicted, and you know that pistol bullets are no laughing-matter. We must appoint the ground, near a house to which we may carry the wounded man if necessary, etc. In fact, we shall be occupied for two or three hours arranging all that there is to arrange."

"Thank you," said the Viscount a second time.

"You are all right?" asked the Colonel. "You are calm?"

"Yes, quite calm, thank you."

The two men retired.

When he realised that he was once more alone, he thought that he was going mad. His servant had lit the lamps, and he sat down at the table to write letters. After tracing, at the head of a sheet: "This is my will," he rose shivering and walked away, feeling incapable of connecting two ideas, of taking a resolution, of making any decision whatever.

So he was going to fight! He could no longer avoid it. Then what was the matter with him? He wished to fight, he had absolutely decided upon this plan of action and taken his resolve, and he now felt clearly, in spite of every effort of mind and forcing of will, that he could not retain even the strength necessary to get him to the place of meeting. He tried to picture the duel, his own attitude and the bearing of his adversary.

From time to time his teeth chattered in his mouth with a

slight clicking noise. He tried to read, and took down Châteauvillard's code of duelling. Then he wondered :

"Does my adversary go to shooting-galleries? Is he well known? Is he classified anywhere? How can I find out?"

He bethought himself of Baron Vaux's book on marksmen with the pistol, and ran through it from end to end. Georges Lamil was not mentioned in it. Yet if the man were not a good shot, he would surely not have promptly agreed to that dangerous weapon and those fatal conditions?

He opened, in passing, a case by Gasunne Renette standing on a small table, and took out one of the pistols, then placed himself as though to shoot and raised his arm. But he was trembling from head to foot and the barrel moved in every direction.

At that, he said to himself :

"It's impossible. I cannot fight in this state."

He looked at the end of the barrel, at the little, black, deep hole that spits death; he thought of the disgrace, of the whispers at the club, of the laughter in drawing-rooms, of the contempt of women, of the allusions in the papers, of the insults which cowards would fling at him.

He was still looking at the weapon, and, raising the hammer, caught a glimpse of a cap gleaming beneath it like a tiny red flame. By good fortune or forgetfulness, the pistol had been left loaded. At the knowledge, he was filled with a confused inexplicable sense of joy.

If, when face to face with the other man, he did not show a proper gallantry and calm, he would be lost for ever. He would be sullied, branded with a mark of infamy, hounded out of society. And he would not be able to achieve that calm, that swaggering poise; he knew it, he felt it. Yet he was brave, since he wanted to fight! . . . He was brave, since. . . .

The thought which hovered in him did not even fulfil itself in his mind; but, opening his mouth wide, he thrust in the

barrel of his pistol with savage gesture until it reached his throat, and pressed on the hammer.

When his valet ran in, at the sound of the report, he found him lying dead upon his back. A shower of blood had splashed the white paper on the table, and made a great red mark beneath these four words :

“ This is my will ”

THE DRUNKARD

I

A NORTHERLY GALE WAS BLOWING, SWEEPING ACROSS THE sky vast wintry clouds, black and heavy, which in their passage flung furious showers of rain upon the earth.

The raging sea roared and shook the coast, hurling shorewards great, slow-moving, frothing waves, which were shattered with the noise of a cannon. They came on quite quietly, one after another, mountain-high; at each squall they flung in the air the white foam of their crests like the sweat from monstrous heads.

The hurricane was sucked into the little valley of Yport; it whistled and moaned, tearing the slates from the roofs, smashing the shutters, throwing down chimneys, hurling such violent gusts along the streets that it was impossible to walk without clinging to the walls, and children would have been swept away like leaves and whisked over the houses into the fields.

The fishing-boats had been hauled up on dry land, for fear of the sea that at high tide would strip the beach clean, and some sailors, sheltered behind the round bellies of the vessels lying on their sides, were watching the fury of sky and sea.

Gradually they went away, for night was falling on the storm, wrapping in darkness the raging ocean and all the strife of angry elements.

Two men still remained, their hands in their pockets, their backs stooped under the squalls, their woollen caps crammed down to their eyes, two tall Norman fishermen, their necks fringed with bristling beards, their skins burnt by the salt

gusts of the open sea, their eyes blue, with a black speck in the centre, the piercing eyes of sailors who see to the edge of the horizon, like birds of prey.

"Come along, Jérémie," said one of them. "We'll pass away the time playing dominoes. I'll pay."

But the other still hesitated, tempted by the game and the brandy, knowing well that he would get drunk again if he went into Parmelle's, and held back, too, by the thought of his wife left all alone in the cottage.

"Anyone would say you'd made a bet to fuddle me every night. Tell me, now, what good does it do you, for you always pay?" he asked.

He laughed none the less at the idea of all the brandy he had drunk at another's expense; he laughed the happy laugh of a Norman getting something for nothing.

His friend Mathurin still held him by the arm.

"Come along, Jérémie. It's no night to go home with nothing warm in your belly. What are you afraid of? Won't your old woman warm your bed for you?"

"Only the other night I couldn't find the door at all," replied Jérémie. "They pretty well fished me out of the brook in front of our place."

The old scoundrel laughed again at the thought of it, and went quietly towards Parmelle's café, where the lighted windows gleamed; Jérémie went forward, dragged by Mathurin and pushed by the wind, incapable of resisting the double force.

The low room was full of sailors, smoke, and clamour. All the men, clad in woollen jerseys, their elbows on the tables, were shouting to make themselves heard. The more drinkers that came in, the louder it was necessary to yell through the din of voices and the click of dominoes on marble, with the inevitable result that the uproar grew worse and worse.

Jérémie and Mathurin went and sat down in a corner and began a game; one after another the glasses of brandy disappeared in the depths of their throats.

Then they played more games, drank more brandy. Mathurin went on pouring it out, winking at the proprietor, a stout man with a face as red as fire, who was chuckling delightedly as if he were enjoying an interminable joke ; and Jérémie went on swallowing the brandy, nodding his head, giving vent to a laughter like the roaring of a wild beast, staring at his comrade with a besotted, happy air.

All the company went home. Each time that one of them opened the outer door to leave, a gust of wind entered the café, driving the thick smoke from the pipes into mad swirls, swinging the lamps at the end of their chains until the flames flickered ; and then suddenly they would hear the heavy shock of a breaking wave and the howling of the gale.

Jérémie, his collar unfastened, was lolling drunkenly, one leg thrust out and one arm hanging down ; in the other hand he held his dominoes.

They were by now left alone with the proprietor, who had come up to them with the sharpest interest.

"Well, Jérémie," he asked, "does it feel good, inside ? Has all the stuff you've poured down freshened you up, eh ?"

"The more goes down," spluttered Jérémie, "the drier it gets, in there."

The innkeeper cast a sly glance at Mathurin.

"And what about your brother, Mathurin ?" he said. "Where is he at the moment ?"

"He's warm all right, don't you worry," replied the sailor, shaking with silent laughter.

And the two of them looked at Jérémie, who triumphantly put down the double six, announcing :

"There's the boss."

When they had finished their game, the proprietor announced :

"Well, boys, I'm going to pack up. I'll leave you the lamp and the bottle ; there's a franc's worth of stuff still left in it. Lock the street door, Mathurin, won't you, and slip the key under the shutter like you did the other night ?"

"Right you are, don't worry," replied Mathurin.

Parmelle shook hands with his two belated customers, and stumped up the wooden stairs. For several minutes his heavy step resounded through the little house; then a loud bump announced that he had got into bed.

The two men went on playing; from time to time the fury of the gale momentarily increased in violence; it shook the door and made the walls tremble. The two tipplers would raise their heads as though someone were coming in; then Mathurin would take the bottle and fill up Jérémie's glass. But suddenly the clock over the counter struck twelve. Its husky chime resembled the clashing of saucepans, and the strokes resounded for a long time, jingling like old iron.

Promptly Mathurin rose, like a sailor whose watch is finished:

"Come alone, Jérémie, we must get along."

The other set himself in motion with more difficulty, got his balance by leaning on the table; then reached the door and opened it while his companion was turning out the lamp.

When they were in the street Mathurin locked up the tavern and said:

"Well, good night; see you to-morrow."

And he vanished in the darkness.

II

Jérémie advanced three steps, then wavered, thrust out his hands, found a wall to hold him upright, and went on again with tottering steps. Now and then a squall, rushing up the narrow street, hurled him forward into a run for several paces; then, when the violence of the swirling blast died down, he halted abruptly, his forward impulse lost, and began to waver drunkenly again upon his wayward legs.

Instinctively he went towards his own home, as birds towards

their nest. He recognised his door at last and began to fumble at it in order to find the lock and put his key in it. He could not find the hole, and began to swear in a low voice. Then he knocked upon the door with his fists, calling to this wife to come and help him.

"Mélina ! hi ! Mélina !"

As he leant against the door to keep himself from falling, it yielded and swung open, and Jérémie, losing his support, collapsed into his house, and rolled on to his nose in the middle of his own dwelling-place. He felt something heavy pass over his body and escape into the night.

He did not move, overwhelmed with fright, bewildered, in terror of the devil, of ghosts, of all the mysterious works of darkness ; for a long time he waited without daring to stir. But as he saw there were no further signs of movement, he recovered a little of his wits, the muddled wits of a hard drinker.

He sat up very softly. Again he waited for a long time, and at last, plucking up courage, murmured :

"Mélina !"

His wife did not answer.

A sudden misgiving crossed his darkened brain, an undefined misgiving, a vague suspicion. He did not move, he stayed there sitting on the ground, in the dark, ransacking his thoughts, brooding over unfinished speculations as unsteady as his feet.

Again he asked :

"Tell me who it was, Mélina. Tell me who it was. I won't do anything to you."

He waited. No voice rose in the darkness. He was thinking aloud, now.

"I've had a drop to drink, I have. I've had a drop to drink. It was him that treated me, the lubber ; he did it, so as I wouldn't go home. I've had a drop to drink."

And then he went on in his former manner.

"Tell me who it was, Mélina, or I'll do you a mischief."

After another pause of waiting, he went on with the slow, obstinate logic of a drunken man.

"It was him that kept me at that swab Parmelle's place; and all the other nights too, so as I mightn't go home. He's plotting with someone. Oh, the stinking swine!"

Slowly he rose to his knees. Blind rage was taking possession of him, mingling with the fumes of the liquor.

"Tell me who it was, Méline!" he repeated, "or I'll bash your head in, I give you fair warning!"

He was standing upright now, shaking all over in a blaze of fury, as though the alcohol in his body had caught fire in his veins. He made a step forward, bumped into a chair, snatched it up, walked on, reached the bed, fumbled at it, and felt under the clothes the warm body of his wife.

Then, mad with rage, he snarled:

"Oh! so you were there all the time, you slut, and wouldn't answer!"

And, raising the chair he grasped in his strong fist, the sailor dashed it down in front of him with exasperated fury. A scream came wildly from the bed, a mad piercing scream. Then he began to beat at it like a thresher in a barn. Soon nothing stirred. The chair broke to pieces, but one leg remained in his hand, and he went on, panting.

Suddenly he stopped and asked:

"Now will you say who it was?"

Méline did not answer.

At that, worn out with fatigue, besotted by his own violence, he sat down again on the ground, stretched himself to his full length, and went to sleep.

When dawn appeared, a neighbour, noticing that the door was open, came in. He found Jérémie snoring on the floor, where lay the remains of a chair, and, in the bed, a mess of blood and flesh.

A VENDETTA

PAOLO SAVERINI'S WIDOW LIVED ALONE WITH HER SON IN A poor little house on the ramparts of Bonifacio. The town, built on a spur of the mountains, in places actually overhanging the sea, looks across a channel bristling with reefs, to the lower shores of Sardinia. At its foot, on the other side and almost completely surrounding it, is the channel that serves as its harbour, cut in the cliff like a gigantic corridor. Through a long circuit between steep walls, the channel brings to the very foot of the first houses the little Italian or Sardinian fishing-boats, and, every fortnight, the old steamboat that runs to and from Ajaccio.

Upon the white mountain the group of houses form a whiter patch still. They look like the nests of wild birds, perched so upon the rock, dominating that terrible channel through which hardly ever a ship risks a passage. The un-resting wind harasses the sea and eats away the bare shore, clad with a sparse covering of grass; it rushes into the ravine and ravages its two sides. The trailing wisps of white foam round the black points of countless rocks that everywhere pierce the waves, look like rags of canvas floating and heaving on the surface of the water.

The widow Saverini's house held for dear life to the very edge of the cliff; its three windows looked out over this wild and desolate scene.

She lived there alone with her son Antoine and their bitch *Sémillante*, a large, thin animal with long, shaggy hair, of the sheep-dog breed. The young man used her for hunting.

One evening, after a quarrel, Antoine Saverini was treacher-

ously slain by a knife-thrust from Nicolas Ravolati, who got away to Sardinia the same night.

When his old mother received his body, carried home by bystanders, she did not weep, but for a long time stayed motionless, looking at it; then, stretching out her wrinkled hand over the body, she swore vendetta against him. She would have no one stay with her, and shut herself up with the body, together with the howling dog. The animal howled continuously, standing at the foot of the bed, her head thrust towards her master, her tail held tightly between her legs. She did not stir, nor did the mother, who crouched over the body with her eyes fixed steadily upon it, and wept great silent tears.

The young man, lying on his back, clad in his thick serge coat with a hole torn across the front, looked as though he slept; but everywhere there was blood; on the shirt, torn off for the first hasty dressing; on his waistcoat, on his breeches, on his face, on his hands. Clots of blood had congealed in his beard and in his hair.

The old mother began to speak to him. At the sound of her voice the dog was silent.

"There, there, you shall be avenged, my little one, my boy, my poor child. Sleep, sleep, you shall be avenged, do you hear! Your mother swears it! And your mother always keeps her word; you know she does."

Slowly she bent over him, pressing her cold lips on the dead lips.

Then Sémillante began to howl once more. She uttered long cries, monotonous, heart-rending, horrible cries.

They remained there, the pair of them, the woman and the dog, till morning.

Antoine Saverini was buried next day, and before long there was no more talk of him in Bonifacio.

He had left neither brothers nor close cousins. No man

was there to carry on the vendetta. Only his mother, an old woman, brooded over it.

On the other side of the channel she watched from morning till night a white speck on the coast. It was a little Sardinian village, Longosardo, where Corsican bandits fled for refuge when too hard pressed. They formed almost the entire population of this hamlet, facing the shores of their own country, and there they awaited a suitable moment to come home, to return to the maquis of Corsica. She knew that Nicolas Ravolati had taken refuge in this very village.

All alone, all day long, sitting by the window, she looked over there and pondered revenge. How could she do it without another's help, so feeble as she was, so near to death? But she had promised, she had sworn upon the body. She could not forget, she could not wait. What was she to do? She could no longer sleep at night, she had no more sleep nor peace; obstinately she searched for a way. The dog slumbered at her feet and sometimes, raising her head, howled into the empty spaces. Since her master had gone, she often howled thus, as though she were calling him, as though her animal soul, inconsolable, had retained an ineffaceable memory of him.

One night, as *Sémillante* was beginning to moan again, the mother had a sudden idea, an idea quite natural to a vindictive and ferocious savage. She meditated on it till morning, then, rising at the approach of day, she went to church. She prayed, kneeling on the stones, prostrate before God, begging Him to aid her, to sustain her, to grant her poor worn-out body the strength necessary to avenge her son.

Then she returned home. There stood in the yard an old barrel with its sides stove in, which held the rain-water; she overturned it, emptied it, and fixed it to the ground with stakes and stones; then she chained up *Sémillante* in this kennel, and went into the house.

Next she began to walk up and down her room, taking no

rest, her eyes still turned to the coast of Sardinia. He was there, the murderer.

All day long and all night long the dog howled. In the morning the old woman took her some water in a bowl, but nothing else ; no soup, no bread.

Another day went by. Sémillante, exhausted, was asleep. Next day her eyes were shining, her hair on end, and she tugged desperately at the chain.

Again the old woman gave her nothing to eat. The animal, mad with hunger, barked hoarsely. Another night went by.

When day broke, Mother Saverini went to her neighbour to ask him to give her two trusses of straw. She took the old clothes her husband had worn and stuffed them with the straw into the likeness of a human figure.

Having planted a post in the ground opposite Sémillante's kennel, she tied the dummy figure to it, which looked now as though it were standing. Then she fashioned a head with a roll of old linen.

The dog, surprised, looked at this straw man, and was silent, although devoured with hunger.

Then the woman went to the pork-butcher and bought a long piece of black pudding. She returned home, lit a wood fire in her yard, close to the kennel, and grilled the black pudding. Sémillante, maddened, leapt about and foamed at the mouth, her eyes fixed on the food, the flavour of which penetrated to her very stomach.

Then with the smoking sausage the mother made a collar for the straw man. She spent a long time lashing it round his neck, as though to stuff it right in. When it was done, she unchained the dog.

With a tremendous bound the animal leapt upon the dummy's throat and with her paws on his shoulders began to rend it. She fell back with a piece of the prey in her mouth, then dashed at it again, sank her teeth into the cords, tore away a few fragments of food, fell back again, and leapt once more, ravenous.

With great bites she rent away the face, and tore the whole neck to shreds.

The old woman watched, motionless and silent, a gleam in her eyes. Then she chained up her dog again, made her go without food for two more days, and repeated the strange performance.

For three months she trained the dog to this struggle, the conquest of a meal by fangs. She no longer chained her up, but launched her upon the dummy with a sign.

She had taught the dog to rend and devour it without hiding food in its throat. Afterwards she would reward the dog with the gift of the black pudding she had cooked for her.

As soon as she saw the man, Sémillante would tremble, then turn her eyes towards her mistress, who would cry "Off!" in a whistling tone, raising her finger.

When she judged that the time was come, Mother Saverini went to confession and took communion one Sunday morning with an ecstatic fervour; then, putting on a man's clothes, like an old ragged beggar, she bargained with a Sardinian fisherman, who took her, accompanied by the dog, to the other side of the straits.

In a canvas bag she had a large piece of black pudding. Sémillante had had nothing to eat for two days. Every minute the old woman made her smell the savoury food, stimulating her hunger with it.

They came to Longosardo. The Corsican woman was limping slightly. She went to the baker's and inquired for Nicolas Ravolati's house. He had resumed his old occupation, that of a joiner. He was working alone at the back of his shop.

The old woman pushed open the door and called him :

"Hey! Nicolas!"

He turned round; then, letting go of her dog, she cried :

"Off, off, bite him, bite him!"

The maddened beast dashed forward and seized his throat.

The man put out his arms, clasped the dog, and rolled upon the ground. For a few minutes he writhed, beating the ground with his feet; then he remained motionless while Sémillante nuzzled at his throat and tore it out in ribbons.

Two neighbours, sitting at their doors, plainly recollected having seen a poor old man come out with a lean black dog which ate, as it walked, something brown that its master was giving to it.

In the evening the old woman returned home. That night she slept well.

COCO

THROUGHOUT THE NEIGHBOURHOOD THE LUCASES' FARM WAS known as the "Métairie," no one could say why. The peasants no doubt connected this word "Métairie" with an idea of wealth and size, for the farm was certainly the largest, most prosperous, and best-managed in the district.

The yard was very large, and was encircled by five rows of magnificent trees, planted to shelter the short, delicate apple-trees from the strong wind of the plain. It contained long, tile-roofed buildings in which the hay and grain were stored, fine cowsheds built of flints, stabling for thirty horses, and a dwelling-house of red brick, that looked like a small country-seat.

The manure heaps were well kept; the watch-dogs lived in kennels, a crowd of chickens ran to and fro in the high grass.

Every day at noon fifteen persons, master, men, and maids, took their places at the long kitchen table on which the soup steamed in a great delf bowl with a pattern of blue flowers.

The animals, horses, cows, pigs, and sheep were fat, clean, and well kept; and Lucas, a tall man who was beginning to acquire a paunch, made his rounds three times a day, watching over all and taking thought for all.

At the far end of the stable they kept, out of charity, a very old white horse that the mistress was anxious to have cared for until it died a natural death, because she had raised and always kept it, and because it stirred memories in her heart.

This old pensioner was looked after by a fifteen-year-old lad named Isidore Duval, called Zidore for short, who, during the winter, gave him his ration of oats and his straw and, in the summer, was obliged to go four times a day and change the

position where he was tied up, so that he might have plenty of fresh grass.

The animal, which was almost crippled, could hardly lift its heavy legs, thick at the knees and swollen above the hoofs. Its coat, which was no longer groomed, looked like white hair, and its long eyelashes gave its eyes a melancholy air.

When Zidore took it out to grass, he had to tug at the halter, so slowly did the animal walk; and the boy, stooping, panting, swore at it, exasperated at having the ancient nag to look after.

The farm-hands, noticing the boy's anger towards Coco, laughed at it; they were always talking to Zidore about the horse, just to exasperate the lad. His friends chaffed him. In the village he was called Coco-Zidore.

The boy was furious, and felt growing in himself a desire, to be revenged on the horse. He was a thin child, long in the leg, very dirty, and with a mop of red, thick, coarse, bristling hair. He seemed stupid, spoke with a stammer, and with infinite labour, as though ideas were born with difficulty into his dull, brutish soul.

For a long time he had felt surprised that Coco was still kept, angry at seeing good stuff wasted on a useless beast. From the moment that it ceased working, it seemed to him wrong to feed it, revolting to waste good oats, expensive oats, on this paralysed jade. Often, in spite of Farmer Lucas' orders, he economised on the horse's food, supplying it with no more than half its ration, keeping back litter and hay. The hatred in his confused, primitive mind grew sharper, the hatred of a grasping peasant, cunning, ferocious, brutal, and cowardly.

When summer came round again, he had to go and move the beast from place to place on its sloping meadow. It was a long way from the farm. More furious each morning, the lad plodded off across the cornfields. The men working in the fields shouted to him in jest:

"Hcy! Zidore! Give my kind regards to Coco."

He never answered, but on the way he would break off a

stick from a hedge, and as soon as he had tethered the old horse in a new place, he would allow it to resume its grazing and then, coming up treacherously, begin to thrack its flanks. The animal would try to escape, to rush away, to avoid the blows, and ran round at the end of its halter as though it were in a circus ring. The boy beat it savagely, running relentlessly after it, his teeth shut hard in anger.

Then he would go slowly away, without looking back, while the horse watched him go with its old eyes, its flanks heaving, out of breath after so much trotting, and it would not lower its bony white head again until it had seen the young peasant's blue blouse vanish in the distance.

As the nights were warm, Coco was now left to sleep out of doors, away at the edge of the valley, beyond the wood. Zidore alone went to see the animal.

The boy had a further habit of amusing himself by throwing stones at it. He would sit down ten paces away on a bank and stay there for half an hour, from time to time flinging a jagged pebble at the old nag, which remained standing, chained up in front of its enemy and looking steadily at him, not daring to crop the grass until he was gone.

But one thought remained firmly planted in the lad's mind : Why feed this horse which did no work ? It seemed to him as if this wretched jade were stealing another's victuals, the possessions of mankind, the property of the good God, were stealing even from himself, Zidore, who had to work for his food.

Little by little, every day, the boy lessened the circle of pasture which he gave it by moving the stake to which its halter was fixed.

The animal went without food, grew thin, pined away. Too weak to break the cord, it stretched out its head towards the broad expanse of green, shining grass so near at hand ; the smell of it reached its nostrils but it could not touch it.

Then one morning Zidore had an idea : he decided not to

go on moving Coco. He had had enough of walking so far for the sake of this miserable carcass.

But he came all the same, to enjoy his revenge. The anxious beast stared at him. He did not beat it that day. He walked round it, his hands in his pockets. He even pretended to change its position, but thrust the stake back into the same hole, and went away, delighted with his invention.

The horse, seeing him go, neighed to remind him ; but the lad began to run, leaving it all alone in the valley, well tied up, and without a blade of grass within range of its jaws.

Famished, it tried to reach the thick verdure that it could touch with the tip of its nostrils. It went down on its knees, stretching its neck, thrusting forward its slobbering lips. All in vain. Throughout the day, the old beast wore itself out with useless, terrible struggles. Hunger ravaged it, a hunger rendered more frightful by the sight of all that good green food stretched out on every side.

The boy did not return that day. He roamed about the woods after birds' nests.

He reappeared the next day. Coco was lying down, exhausted. It rose at the sight of the boy, expecting that at last its position would be changed.

But the young peasant did not even touch the mallet lying in the ground. He came up, stared at the animal, flung a clod of earth at its muzzle, which splashed the white hair, and went away again, whistling.

The horse remained standing as long as it could still keep him in sight ; then, feeling only too well that its attempts to reach the near-by grass would be useless, lay down once more upon its side and closed its eyes.

Next day Zidore did not come.

When, the following day, he drew near to Coco, who was still lying down, he saw that the horse was dead.

He remained standing, looking at it, pleased with his work, and at the same time surprised that it was already finished.

He touched it with his foot, lifted one of its legs and then let it fall back again, sat down on the body and stayed there, his eyes fixed on the grass, without thinking of anything.

He returned to the farm, but did not mention the accident, for he wanted to go on playing truant at the times when he had been accustomed to go and change the horse's position.

He went to see it the next day. Crows took flight at his approach. Innumerable flies were crawling about the body and buzzing all round it.

On his return he announced the event. The beast was so old that no one was surprised. The master said to two hands :

"Get your spades and dig a hole where it lies."

The men buried the horse just at the spot where it had died of hunger.

The grass came up lush, verdant, and vigorous, nourished by the poor body.

THE HAND

A CIRCLE HAD BEEN FORMED ROUND MONSIEUR BERMUTIER, examining magistrate, who was giving his opinion on the mysterious Saint Cloud affair. For the past month all Paris had been wildly excited over this inexplicable crime. No one could make head or tail of it.

Monsieur Bermutier was standing with his back to the fireplace, and was talking, threading the evidence together, discussing the various theories, but drawing no conclusions.

A number of women had risen to draw near to him, and were still standing up, their eyes fixed on the magistrate's clean-shaven lips, whence his grave observations issued. They shivered and trembled, their nerves on edge with inquisitive terror, with that greedy and insatiate desire to be terrified which haunts their souls and tortures them like a physical hunger.

One of them, paler than the rest, remarked during an interval of silence :

"It's horrible. It verges upon the supernatural. No one will ever get to the bottom of it."

The magistrate turned to her.

"Yes, Madame," he said, "probably no one ever will. As for the word 'supernatural' which you have just used, it has nothing to do with the case. We are dealing with a crime planned with the greatest skill and executed skilfully, so well entangled in mystery that we cannot unravel it from its attendant circumstances. But once upon a time I myself had to deal with an affair in which an element of fantasy did really appear to be involved. We had to let that one go too, for we were never able to clear it up."

Several women cried at the same time, so rapidly that their voices sounded as one :

“ Oh, do tell us the story ! ”

Monsieur Bermutier smiled gravely, as an examining magistrate ought to smile.

“ But please do not believe,” he resumed, “ that I could for one moment imagine that there was anything supernatural about this adventure. I only believe in normal causes. But if, instead of employing the word ‘ supernatural ’ to express that which we do not understand, we use merely the word ‘ inexplicable,’ it will be much more useful. At any rate, in the affair which I am going to relate to you, it is more especially the attendant circumstances, the preliminary circumstances, which appealed to me. Here are the facts of the case :

“ In those days I was examining magistrate at Ajaccio, a little white town lying on the shores of a delightful bay entirely surrounded by high mountains.

“ The affairs with which I was most particularly concerned in those parts were the affairs of vendetta. There are some magnificent vendettas, as dramatic as they could well be, ferocious, heroic. In this district we come across the finest stories of revenge that you could possibly imagine, hatred centuries old, appeased for a moment, never wiped out, abominable plots, murders become massacres, and almost deeds to boast of. For two years I heard tell of nothing but the price of blood, of the terrible Corsican custom which obliges a man to revenge every wrong upon the person who committed it, upon his descendants and those near to him. I have seen old men’s throats cut, and their children’s and their cousins’ ; my head was filled with these stories.

“ Now one day I learnt that an Englishman had just taken, for a number of years, a small villa at the end of the bay. He had brought with him a French manservant whom he had engaged at Marseilles on his way out.

“ Soon everybody began to take an interest in this strange

person, who lived alone in his house, never going out except to shoot or fish. He spoke to no one, never went into the town, and, every morning, spent an hour or two at pistol and carbine practice.

"Legends grew up about him. People suggested that he was an important personage who had left his native land for political reasons; then it was stated that he was hiding after having committed an abominable crime. They even quoted circumstances of a peculiarly horrible nature.

"I was anxious, in my position as examining magistrate, to get some information about this man; but I found it impossible to discover anything. His name he gave as Sir John Rowell.

"I was content, then, with keeping him under close watch; but in fact I had no cause to believe in any suspicious circumstances connected with him.

"But as the rumours about him continued and grew, and became common property, I resolved to try and see this stranger for myself, and I made a habit of shooting regularly in the neighbourhood of his property. For a long time I waited my chance. At last it presented itself in the form of a partridge which I shot at and killed under the Englishman's nose. My dog brought it to me, but, taking it with me, I went to make excuses for my discourteous act and to request Sir John Rowell to accept the bird.

"He was a big man with red hair and a red beard, very tall and very stout, a polite and placid Hercules. There was about him no trace of the so-called British stiffness, and he thanked me warmly for my civility in French of which the accent was unmistakably from the other side of the English Channel.

At the end of a month we had chatted together five or six times.

"At last one evening, as I was passing his gate, I saw him smoking a pipe, straddling a chair in his garden. I greeted

him, and he asked me to come in and drink a glass of beer. I did not oblige him to repeat his invitation.

"He received me with every mark of the true, meticulous English courtesy, spoke enthusiastically of France and Corsica, declaring that he was delighted with '*cette pays*' and '*cette rivage*.'

"Thereupon, with the greatest care and under the form of a lively curiosity, I asked him some questions about his life and his plans. He answered without a sign of embarrassment, and told me that he had travelled a great deal in Africa, India, and America. He added with a laugh :

" 'Oh, yes, I've had plenty of adventures.'

"Then he began to tell me hunting-stories, and gave me most interesting details about hunting hippopotami, tigers, and even gorillas.

" 'They are all formidable animals,' I observed.

" 'Oh, no,' he said with a smile, 'the worst is man.' And his smile changed to a laugh, the pleasant laughter of a hearty, happy Englishman.

" 'I've hunted man a lot, too.'

"Then he began to speak of weapons, and invited me to come in and see his various types of guns.

"His drawing-room was hung with black—black silk embroidered with gold. Large yellow flowers twisted upon the dark material, gleaming like flames.

" 'It's a Japanese material,' he told me.

"But in the centre of the largest panel a strange thing caught my eye. Upon a square of red velvet a black object lay in sharp relief: I went up to it; it was a hand, a man's hand. Not the hand of a skeleton, white and clean, but a black, dried hand, with yellow nails, the muscles laid bare, and traces of stale blood, like dirt, on the bones, that had been cut clean off, as though with a blow from an axe, at the centre of the forearm.

"Round the wrist an enormous iron chain, riveted and

welded on this foul limb, fastened it to the wall by a ring strong enough to hold an elephant.

" 'What is that ? ' I asked.

" 'That's my best enemy,' answered the Englishman, calmly. 'It came from America. It was cut off with a sabre and the skin torn off with a sharp stone and dried in the sun for eight days. Oh, it was a fortunate thing for me.'

"I touched this human relic, which must have belonged to a colossus. The fingers, excessively long, were attached by enormous muscles which in places still retained shreds of flesh. The hand was frightful to see; flayed in this wise, it instinctively made me think of the revenge of some savage.

" 'The man must have been very strong,' I said.

" 'Oh, yes,' said the Englishman sweetly, 'but I was stronger than he. I put that chain on to hold him.'

"I thought the man was jesting, and said :

" 'The chain is quite useless now; the hand will not escape.'

"Sir John Rowell replied in a grave voice :

" 'It was always trying to get away. The chain is necessary.'

"With a swift glance I examined his face, asking myself :

" 'Is the man mad, or has he merely a poor taste in jokes ? '

"But his face remained impenetrable, placid and kindly. I began to speak of other matters, and expressed my admiration for his guns.

"I noticed, however, that three loaded revolvers were lying about on various pieces of furniture, as though the man lived in constant fear of an attack.

"I revisited him on several occasions. Then I went there no more. People had grown accustomed to his presence. They were all completely indifferent to him.

"A whole year went by. Then one morning near the end

of November my servant woke me and announced that Sir John Rowell had been murdered during the night.

"Half an hour later I entered the Englishman's house with the commissioner-general and the chief of police. The valet, quite desperate and at his wits' end, was weeping in front of the door. At first I suspected this man, but he was innocent.

"The criminal was never discovered.

"As I entered Sir John's drawing-room, I saw at the first glance the body, lying on its back, in the centre of the room.

"The waistcoat was torn, and a rent sleeve hung down; everything pointed to the fact that a terrible struggle had taken place.

"The Englishman had died of strangulation. His face, black and swollen, a terrifying sight, wore an expression of the most appalling terror; he held something between his clenched teeth; and his neck, pierced with five holes which might have been made with iron spikes, was covered with blood.

"A doctor joined us. He made a long examination of the finger-prints in the flesh and uttered these strange words:

"'It's just as if he had been strangled by a skeleton.'

"A shiver ran down my spine, and I turned my eyes to the wall, to the spot where I had formerly seen the horrible flayed hand. It was no longer there. The chain, broken, hung down.

"I stooped over the dead man, and I found in his distorted mouth one of the fingers of the vanished hand, cut, or rather sawn, in two by his teeth just at the second joint.

"We proceeded with the formal investigations. Nothing was discovered. No door had been forced, no window, no article of furniture. The two watch-dogs had not awakened.

"Here, in a few words, is the servant's deposition:

"For the past month his master had seemed to be very agitated. He had received many letters, which he burnt as soon as they arrived.

"Often he would take up a horse-whip, in a rage which savoured of madness, and beat furiously the dried hand which had been sealed to the wall and removed, no one knew how, at the very hour of the crime.

"He had a habit of going to bed very late, and carefully locked all the doors and windows. He always had weapons within the reach of his arm. Often, at night, he would speak in a loud voice, as though quarrelling with someone.

"That night it happened that he had made no noise, and it was only when he came to open the windows that the servant had found Sir John murdered. He suspected no one.

"I communicated what I knew of the death to the magistrates and public officials, and a detailed inquiry was made over the entire island. Nothing was discovered.

"Then, one night, three months after the crime, I had a fearful nightmare. It seemed to me that I saw the hand, the horrible hand, run like a scorpion or a spider along my curtains and my walls. Three times I awoke, three times I fell asleep again, three times I saw the hideous relic career round my room, moving its fingers like paws.

"Next day the hand was brought to me; it had been found in the cemetery, on the tomb in which Sir John Rowell was buried, for we had been unable to discover his family.

"The index-finger was missing.

"There, ladies, that is my story. I know nothing more."

The ladies, horror-stricken, were pale and trembling.

"But that is not a *dénouement*, nor an explanation!" exclaimed one of them. "We shall not sleep if you do not tell us what really happened, in your opinion."

The magistrate smiled austere.

"Oh, as for me, ladies," he said, "I shall certainly spoil your bad dreams! I simply think that the lawful owner of the hand was not dead, and that he came to fetch it with the

one that remained to him. But I certainly don't know how he did it. It was a kind of vendetta."

"No," murmured one of the ladies, "that can't be the explanation."

And the judge, still smiling, concluded :

"I warned you that my theory would not appeal to you."

THE TRAMP

HE HAD KNOWN BETTER DAYS, IN SPITE OF HIS POVERTY AND his infirmity.

At the age of fifteen both his legs had been crushed by a carriage on the Varville high road. Ever since then he had been a beggar, dragging himself along the roads and across the farmyards, balanced on his crutches, which had forced his shoulders to the level of his ears. His head looked as though buried between two hills.

As a child, he had been found in a ditch by the rector of Billettes, on the eve of All Souls' Day, and for that reason had been christened Nicolas Toussaint (All Saints). He was brought up by charity, and remained a stranger to any form of education. It was after drinking some brandy given him by the village baker that he was lamed, which was considered an excellent joke ; since then he had been a vagabond, not knowing how to do anything except hold out his hand for alms.

In earlier days the Baroness d'Avary had given him a sort of kennel filled with straw to sleep in, next to the chicken-house on the farm belonging to her country-house ; and in the times of famine he was always certain of finding a piece of bread and a glass of cider in the kitchen. Often he received there a few coppers as well, thrown down by the old lady from the top of the terrace steps or from the windows of her room. Now she was dead.

In the village he was given scarcely anything ; he was too well known ; people were tired of him after forty years of seeing him drag his deformed and ragged body round from hovel to hovel on his two wooden paws. Yet he would not leave the neighbourhood, for he knew no other thing on earth

but this corner of the country, these three or four hamlets in which he had dragged out his miserable life. He had set boundaries to his begging, and would never have passed over the frontiers within which he was used to keep himself.

He did not know if the world extended far beyond the trees which had always bounded his view. He had no curiosity in the matter. And when rustics, weary of meeting him continually at the edges of their fields or beside their ditches, shouted to him: "Why do you never go to the other villages, instead of always hobbling round these parts?" he would not answer and would go away, seized with a vague fear of the unknown, the fear of a poor man in confused terror of a thousand things, new faces, rough treatment, the suspicious looks of people who did not know him, and the policemen who went two by two along the roads, and sent him ducking instinctively into the bushes or behind the heaps of stones.

When he saw them in the distance, glittering in the sun, he acquired suddenly a strange, monstrous agility in getting himself into some hiding-place. He tumbled off his crutches, letting himself fall like a rag, and rolled up into a ball, becoming quite small, invisible, flattened like a hare in its form, blending his brown rags with the brown earth.

As a matter of fact he had never had anything to do with them. But he carried it in his blood, as though he had received this terror from the parents he had never seen.

He had no refuge, no roof, no hut, no shelter. He slept anywhere in the summer, and in the winter he slipped under barns or into cowsheds with remarkable adroitness. He always decamped before his presence was discovered. He knew the holes by which buildings might be entered; and the handling of his crutches had given surprising strength to his arms; by the strength of his wrists alone he would climb up into hay-lofts, where he sometimes stayed for four or five days without stirring out, when he had collected sufficient provisions during his rounds.

He lived like the beasts of the woods, surrounded by men, knowing no one, loving no one, arousing in the peasants no emotion but a sort of indifferent contempt and resigned hostility. He had been nicknamed "Bell," because he swung between his two props like a bell between its two hammers.

For the past two days he had had nothing to eat. No one gave him anything now. People were at last quite tired of him. The peasant women at their doors shouted at him from the distance when they saw him coming :

"Be off with you, you clod ! Why, I gave you a bit of bread only three days ago !"

And he swivelled round on his props and went off to the next house, where he was welcomed in the same fashion.

The women declared to their next-door neighbours :

"After all, we can't feed the lazybones all the year round."

The lazybones, however, needed food every day.

He had roamed all over Saint Hilaire, Varville, and Les Billettes without harvesting a solitary centime or an old crust. No hope remained, except at Tournolles ; but that required of him a journey of two leagues on the high road, and he felt too weary to drag himself along, with his belly as empty as his pocket.

But he set off.

It was December ; a cold wind ran over the fields and whistled in the bare branches, and the clouds galloped across the low, dark sky, hastening to an unknown goal. The cripple went slowly on, painfully moving his crutches one after the other, steadying himself on the one twisted leg that remained to him, terminated by a club-foot swathed in a rag.

From time to time he sat down at the roadside and rested for a few minutes. Hunger was overwhelming his confused and stupid wits with utter misery. He had only one idea, to eat, but he did not know how it was to be brought about.

For three hours he struggled along the long road ; then,

when the trees of the village came into sight, he hastened his movements.

The first peasant whom he met, and of whom he asked alms, replied :

"Here you are back again at your old trade ! Shall we never be rid of you ? "

And " Bell " departed. At every door he was roughly treated and sent away without being given anything. But he continued his round, patient and obstinate. He did not garner a halfpenny.

Then he visited the farms, dragging himself across fields soft with rain, so exhausted that he could not lift his sticks. Everywhere he was driven away. It was one of those cold, melancholy days on which hearts are hardened, and tempers hasty, on which the soul is dark, and the hands open neither to give nor to succour.

When he had visited every house with which he was acquainted, he went and lay down in the corner of a ditch which ran alongside Maître Cliquet's farmyard. He unhooked himself—this is the best way of expressing the manner in which he let himself fall down between the high crutches that he slipped under his arms. For a long time he remained motionless, tortured by hunger, but too much of an animal fully to comprehend his fathomless misery.

He waited for he knew not what, in that vague state of expectation which lives on, deathless, in all of us. There in the corner of the yard, in the icy wind, he awaited the mysterious aid from heaven or mankind which a wretched victim will always hope for, without wondering how, or why, or by whose agency it can possibly arrive.

A flock of black hens was passing, seeking their sustenance in the earth, which gives food to all creatures. At every moment their sharp beaks found a bit of grain or an invisible insect, after which the birds would continue their slow, sure search.

"Bell" watched them, thinking of nothing; then there came to him, into his belly if not into his head, the feeling, rather than the thought, that one of those birds would make excellent eating, grilled over a fire of dead wood.

The idea that he was about to commit a theft never touched him. Taking up a stone which lay within his reach, he threw it at the nearest hen, and, being an expert shot, killed it outright. The bird fell on its side, beating its wings. The rest fled, swaying from side to side on their thin legs, and "Bell," clambering once more into his crutches, started off to retrieve his booty, his movements resembling those of the hens.

As he arrived beside the little black corpse stained on the head with blood, he was given a violent blow in the back which made him loose hold of his sticks and sent him rolling for ten paces in front of him. Maître Chiquet, exasperated, rushed upon the marauder and showered blows upon him, beating him furiously, with the fury of a peasant who has been robbed, belabouring with fist and knee the entire body of the cripple, who could not defend himself.

The farm-hands came up in their turn, and joined their master in battering the beggar. When they were weary of beating him, they picked him up, carried him off, and shut him up in the wood-shed while someone went to fetch the police.

"Bell," half dead, bleeding, and fainting with hunger, remained lying on the ground. Evening came, the night, then dawn. He had still had nothing to eat.

About midday the police appeared and opened the door with great care, expecting to meet with some resistance, for Maître Chiquet had given them to understand that he had been attacked by the beggar and had defended himself with great difficulty.

"Come on! Up you get!" shouted the sergeant.

But "Bell" could not move. He tried hard to hoist himself on to his sticks, but did not succeed. They thought he

was shamming, trying to trick them, acting with the obstinate ill-will common to malefactors, and the two armed men laid rough hands on him and set him on his crutches by main force.

Terror had gripped him, his instinctive terror of all wearers of the yellow shoulder-belt, the terror of the hunted before the hunter, of the mouse before the cat. With a superhuman effort he managed to remain upright.

"Off we go!" said the sergeant. He walked. All the farm-hands watched him go. The women shook their fists at him; the men sniggered and abused him: he was caught at last! Good riddance!

He went off between his two guards. He succeeded in finding the desperate energy necessary to keep going until evening, stupefied, no longer even realising what was happening to him, too frightened to understand anything.

The people they met on the way stopped to watch him go by, and the peasants murmured:

"It's some thief or other."

Towards nightfall they reached the capital of the canton. He had never been so far as this. He hardly realised at all what was going on, nor what might happen to him afterwards. All these terrible, unforeseen events, these faces and and strange houses, bewildered him.

He did not utter a word, having nothing to say, for he no longer understood anything. And besides, it was so many years since he had spoken to anyone that he had very nearly lost the use of his tongue; moreover, his thoughts were too confused to find expression in words.

He was locked up in the town jail. The policemen never imagined that he might need something to eat, and he was left until next day.

But when they came down to question him, they found him lying dead upon the floor. What a surprise!

A PARRICIDE

COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENCE HAD PLEADED INSANITY. How else was this strange crime to be accounted for ?

One morning, in the reeds near Chatou, two bodies had been found locked in each other's arms, those of a man and his wife. They were a couple well known in society, wealthy, no longer young, and only married the previous year, the woman having lost her first husband three years before.

They were not known to have any enemies, and they had not been robbed. They had apparently been thrown into the river from the bank, after having been struck, one after the other, with a long iron spike.

The inquest did not lead to any discovery. The watermen who were questioned knew nothing ; the affair was on the point of being abandoned, when a young joiner from a neighbouring village, named Georges Louis, known as The Gentleman, gave himself up.

To all interrogation he refused to make any other answer than :

"I had known the man for two years, the woman for six months. They often came to me to have old furniture mended, because I am good at the work."

And when he was asked : "Why did you kill them ?" he would reply obstinately :

"I killed them because I wanted to kill them."

Nothing more could be got out of him.

The man was doubtless an illegitimate child formerly put out to nurse in the district and afterwards abandoned. He had no name except Georges Louis, but since, as he grew up, he had shown himself unusually intelligent, with tastes and a

natural delicacy quite foreign to his comrades, he had been nicknamed "The Gentleman," and was never called anything else. He was known to be remarkably clever as a joiner, the profession he had adopted. He even did a little carving in wood. He was also said to have ideas above his station, to be a follower of communistic doctrines, even of nihilism, a great reader of novels of adventure and bloodthirsty romances, an influential elector and a clever speaker at working-men's or peasants' meetings.

Counsel for the defence had pleaded insanity.

How, in truth, could it be supposed that this workman should have killed his best clients, clients who were both rich and generous (he admitted this), who in two years had given him work which had brought in three thousand francs (his books testified to it)? There was only one explanation: insanity, the obsession of a man who has slipped out of his class and avenges himself on society as a whole by the murder of two gentlemen; and counsel made a neat allusion to his nickname of "The Gentleman," given to this outcast by the whole neighbourhood.

"Consider the irony of the situation!" he exclaimed. "Was it not capable of still more violently exciting this unhappy youth with no father nor mother? He is an ardent republican; nay, he even belongs to that political party whose members the State was once wont to shoot and deport, but which to-day she welcomes with open arms, the party to whom arson is a first principle and murder a perfectly simple expedient.

"These lamentable doctrines, nowadays acclaimed in debating-societies, had ruined this man. He has listened to men of the republican party, yes! and even women too, demanding the blood of Monsieur Gambetta, the blood of Monsieur Grévy; his diseased brain has succumbed, he has thirsted for blood, the blood of nobility!

"It is not this man, gentlemen, whom you should condemn, it is the Commune!"

Murmurs of approval ran to and fro. It was generally felt that counsel for the defence had won his case. The public prosecutor did not reply.

Then the judge asked the prisoner the customary question:

"Prisoner at the bar, have you nothing to add in your defence?"

The man rose.

He was small in stature, with flaxen hair and grey eyes, steady and bright. A strong, frank, sonorous voice came from the throat of this slender youth, and his very first words altered at once the view that had been formed of him.

He spoke loudly, in a declamatory tone, but so clearly that his slightest words carried to the ends of the large court:

"Your Worship, as I do not wish to go to a madhouse, and even prefer the guillotine, I will tell you all.

"I killed the man and the woman because they were my parents.

"Now hear me and judge me.

"A woman, having given birth to a son, sent him out to nurse. It had been well if she had known to what district her accomplice had carried the little creature, innocent, but condemned to lasting misery, to the shame of illegitimate birth, to worse than that: to death, since he was abandoned, since the nurse, no longer receiving the monthly allowance, might well have left him, as such women often do, to pine away, to suffer from hunger, to perish of neglect.

"The woman who suckled me was honest, more honest, more womanly, greater of soul, a better mother, than my own mother. She brought me up. She was wrong to do her duty. It is better to leave to their death the wretches who are flung out into provincial villages, as rubbish is flung out at the roadside.

"I grew up with the vague impression that I was the bearer

of some dishonour. One day the other children called me 'bastard.' They did not know the meaning of the word, which one of them had heard at home. Neither did I know its meaning, but I sensed it.

"I was, I can honestly say, one of the most intelligent children in the school. I should have been an honest man, Your Worship, perhaps a remarkable man, if my parents had not committed the crime of abandoning me.

"And it was against me that this crime was committed. I was the victim, they were the guilty ones. I was defenceless, they were pitiless. They ought to have loved me: they cast me out.

"I owed my life to them—but is life a gift? Mine, at any rate, was nothing but a misfortune. After their shameful desertion of me, I owed them nothing but revenge. They committed against me the most inhuman, the most shameful, the most monstrous crime that can be committed against a human being.

"A man insulted, strikes; a man robbed takes back his goods by force. A man deceived, tricked, tormented, kills; a man whose face is slapped, kills; a man dishonoured, kills. I was more grievously robbed, deceived, tormented, morally slapped in the face, dishonoured, than all the men whose anger you condone.

"I have avenged myself, I have killed. It was my lawful right. I took their happy lives in exchange for the horrible life which they imposed on me.

"You will call it parricide! Were they my parents, those people to whom I was an abominable burden, a terror, a mark of infamy; to whom my birth was a calamity and my life a threat of shame? They sought their selfish pleasure; they brought forth the child they had not counted on. They suppressed that child. My turn has come to repay them in kind.

"And yet, even at the eleventh hour, I was prepared to love them.

"It is now two years, as I have already told you, since the

man, my father, came to my house for the first time. I suspected nothing. He ordered two articles of furniture. I learnt later that he had obtained information from the village priest, under the seal of a secret compact.

"He often came; he gave me work and paid me well. Sometimes he even chatted with me on various subjects. I felt some affection for him.

"At the beginning of this year he brought his wife, my mother. When she came in she was trembling so violently that I thought she was the victim of a nervous disorder. Then she asked for a chair and a glass of water. She said nothing; she stared at my stock with the expression of a lunatic, and to all the questions he put to her she answered nothing but yes and no, quite at random! When she had gone, I thought her not quite right in the head.

"She came back the following month. She was calm, mistress of herself. They remained talking quite a long time that day, and gave me a big order. I saw her again three times without guessing anything; but one day, lo and behold! she began to talk to me about my life, my childhood, and my parents. I answered: 'My parents, Madame, were wretches who abandoned me.' At that she set her hand to her heart and dropped senseless. I thought at once: 'This is my mother!' but was careful not to give myself away. I wanted her to go on coming.

"So I in my turn made inquiries. I learned that they had been married just the previous July, my mother having been only three years a widow. There had been rumours enough that they had been lovers during her first husband's lifetime, but no proof had been forthcoming. I was the proof, the proof they had first hidden, and hoped ultimately to destroy.

"I waited. She reappeared one evening, accompanied, as always, by my father. She seemed to be in a very agitated state that day, I do not know why. Then, just as she was going, she said to me:

" 'I wish you well, because I believe you are an honest lad and a good worker ; doubtless you will be thinking of getting married some day ; I have come to make it possible for you to choose freely any woman you prefer. I myself married the first time against the desires of my heart, and I know how much suffering it brings. Now I am rich, childless, free, mistress of my fortune. Here is your marriage portion.'

" She held out to me a large envelope.

" I stared fixedly at her, then said :

" 'Are you my mother ?'

" She drew back three paces and hid her eyes in her hand, so that she could see me no more. He, the man, my father, supported her in his arms and shouted at me :

" 'You are mad !'

" 'Not at all,' I replied. 'I know very well that you are my parents. I am not to be deceived so easily. Admit it, and I will keep your secret ; I will bear no malice, I will remain what I am now, a joiner.'

" He recoiled towards the door, still supporting his wife, who was beginning to sob. I ran and locked the door, put the key in my pocket, and continued :

" 'Look at her, then, and continue to deny that she is my mother !'

" At that he lost his self-control and turned very pale, terrified by the thought that the scandal hitherto avoided might suddenly come out ; that their position, their good name, their honour would be lost at a blow.

" 'You're a scoundrel,' he stammered, 'trying to get money out of us. And yet they tell us to be good to the common people, the louts, to help them and succour them !'

" My mother, bewildered, was repeating over and over again :

" 'Let us go. Let us go.'

" Then, as the door was locked, he exclaimed :

" 'If you don't open the door immediately, I'll have you jailed for blackmail and assault !'

"I had kept my self-control; I opened the door, and saw them disappear in the darkness.

"At that I felt suddenly as though I had just been orphaned, abandoned, cast into the gutter. A dreadful sadness, mingled with rage, hatred, and disgust overwhelmed me. I felt a swollen rush of emotion through my whole being, a rising tide of justice, righteousness, honour, and spurned affection. I set off running in order to catch them up on the bank of the Seine, which they must follow in order to reach Chatou station.

"I overtook them before long. The night became pitch-dark. I slunk along on the grass, so that they did not hear me. My mother was still crying. My father was saying:

"'It is your own fault. Why did you insist on seeing him? It was madness, in our position. We might have done him kindness by stealth, without showing ourselves. Seeing that we could not hope to recognise him, what was the use of these perilous visits?'

"Then I threw myself in their path, a suppliant.

"'Clearly you *are* my parents,' I stammered. 'You have already cast me off once; will you reject me a second time?'

"At that, Your Worship, he raised his hand to me, I swear it on my honour, on the law, on the State. He struck me, and as I seized him by his coat-collar, he drew a revolver from his pocket.

"I saw red, I no longer knew what I did. I had my callipers in my pocket; I struck him, struck him with all my force.

"Then the woman began to cry: 'Help! Murder!' and tore at my beard. Apparently I killed her too. How can I know what I did at that moment?

"Then, when I saw them both lying on the ground, I threw them into the Seine, without thinking.

"That is all. Now judge me."

The prisoner sat down again. After this revelation the trial was postponed until the following session. It will soon come on again. If you and I were the jury, what should we do with this parricide?

THE LITTLE ONE

MONSIEUR LEMONNIER HAD REMAINED A WIDOWER WITH ONE child. He had loved his wife madly, with a noble and tender love that never failed, throughout the whole of their life together. He was a good, honest fellow, simple, very simple in fact, free from diffidence and malice.

Having fallen in love with a poor neighbour, he asked for her hand and married her. He was in a fairly prosperous drapery business, was making quite a good amount of money, and did not for one moment imagine that the girl might not have accepted him for himself alone.

At all events she made him happy. He had no eyes for anybody or anything but her, thought only of her, and looked at her continually in an abandon of adoration. During meals he would commit a thousand blunders rather than look away from the beloved face; he would pour the wine into his plate and the water into the salt-cellar, and then would burst out laughing like a child, declaring :

"There, you see I love you too much; it makes me do such a lot of silly things."

And she would smile, with an air of calm resignation, and then would turn away her eyes, as though embarrassed by her husband's worship, and would try to make him talk, to chat on any subject; but he would reach across the table and take her hand, and, holding it in his, would murmur :

"My little Jeanne, my dear little Jeanne."

She would end by growing vexed and exclaiming :

"Oh, do be reasonable; get on with your dinner, and let me get on with mine!"

He would utter a sigh and break off a mouthful of bread, which he would proceed slowly to munch.

For five years they had no children. Then suddenly she found herself with child. It was a delirious happiness for them. He would never leave her during the whole of her pregnancy; to such an extent, in fact, that her maid, an old nurse who had brought her up and was given to speaking her mind to them, would sometimes thrust him out of the house and lock the door, so as to force him to take the air.

He had formed an intimate friendship with a young man who had known his wife since her childhood, and who was second head clerk at the Prefecture. Monsieur Duretourt dined three times a week at the Lemonniers', brought flowers for Madame and sometimes secured a box at the theatre; and often, during dessert, the kind, affectionate Lemonnier would turn to his wife and exclaim:

"With a comrade like you and a friend like him, one is perfectly happy on earth."

She died in childbed. He nearly died too. But the sight of the child gave him courage: a little shrivelled creature that moaned.

He loved the baby with a passionate and grief-stricken love, a morbid love, wherein remained the remembrance of death, but wherein survived something of his adoration of the dead woman. The boy was his wife's flesh, her continued being, a quintessence of her, as it were. He was her very life poured into another body; she had disappeared that he might exist. . . . And the father embraced him frantically. . . .

But also the child had killed her, had taken, stolen that adored existence, had fed upon it, had drunk up her share of life. . . . And Monsieur Lemonnier replaced his son in the cradle and sat down beside him to contemplate him. He remained there for hours and hours, watching him, musing of a thousand sad or sweet things. Then, as the child was sleeping, he stooped over his face and wept into his coverings.

The child grew. The father could not forgo his presence for an hour; he would prowl about the nursery, take him out for walks, put on his clothes, wash him, give him his meals. His friend, Monsieur Duretour, also seemed to cherish the baby, and would embrace him with rapture, with those frenzies of affection which are a parent's property. He would make him leap in his arms or ride a cockhorse for hours upon his leg, and suddenly, overturning him upon his knees, would raise his short frock and kiss the brat's fat thighs and round little calves.

"Isn't he a darling, isn't he a darling!" would Monsieur Lemonnier murmur in delight, and Monsieur Duretour would clasp the child in his arms, tickling his neck with his moustache.

Only Céleste, the old nurse, seemed to have no affection for the little one. She was vexed at his pranks, and seemed exasperated by the cajolery of the two men.

"Is that any way to bring up a child?" she would exclaim. "You'll make a perfect monkey of him."

More years went by, and Jean attained the age of nine. He could scarcely read, he had been so spoilt, and he always did exactly as he liked. He had a stubborn will, a habit of obstinate resistance, and a violent temper. The father always gave way and granted him everything. Monsieur Duretour was perpetually buying and bringing for the little one the toys he coveted, and fed him on cakes and sweets.

On these occasions Céleste would lose her temper, and exclaim:

"It's a shame, Monsieur, a shame. You'll be the ruin of the child, the ruin of him, do you hear! But it's got to be stopped, and stopped it shall be, yes. I promise it shall, and before long, too."

"Well, what about it, my good woman?" Monsieur Lemonnier would answer with a smile. "I'm too fond of him, I can't go against his will. It's up to you to take your share in his upbringing."

Jean was weak and somewhat ailing. The doctor declared him to be anæmic, and ordered iron, red meat, and strong broth.

But the little one liked nothing but cakes, and refused all other nourishment ; and his father, in despair, stuffed him with cream tarts and chocolate éclairs.

One evening, as the two sat down to table alone together, Céleste brought in the soup-tureen with an assurance and an air of authority unusual in her. She abruptly took off the lid, plunged the ladle into the middle of it, and announced :

"There's broth such as I've never made before ; the little one really must have some, this time."

Monsieur Lemonnier, terrified, lowered his head. He saw that this was not going down well.

Céleste took his plate, filled it herself, and placed it back in front of him.

He immediately tasted the soup and declared :

"Yes, it is excellent."

Then the servant took the little boy's plate and poured into it a whole ladleful of soup. She retired two paces and waited.

Jean sniffed it, pushed away the plate, and uttered a "pah" of disgust. Céleste, grown pale, went swiftly up to him and, seizing the spoon full of soup, thrust it forcibly into the child's half-open mouth.

He choked, coughed, sneezed, and spat, and, yelling, grasped his glass in his fist and flung it at his nurse. It caught her full in the stomach. At that, exasperated, she took the brat's head under her arm and began to ram spoonful after spoonful of soup down his gullet. He steadily vomited it back, stamping his feet with rage, writhing, choking, and beating the air with his hands, as red as though he were dying of suffocation.

At first the father remained in such stupefaction that he made no movement at all. Then suddenly he rushed forward with

the wild rage of a madman, took the servant by the throat, and flung her against the wall.

"Get out! . . . out! . . . out! . . . brute!" he stammered.

But with a vigorous shake she repulsed him, and with dishevelled hair, her cap hanging down her back, her eyes blazing, cried:

"What's come over you now? You want to beat me because I make the child eat his soup, when you'll kill him with your spoiling!"

"Out! . . . be off with you . . . off with you, brute!" he repeated, trembling from head to foot.

Then in a rage she turned upon him, and facing him eye to eye, said in a trembling voice:

"Ah! . . . You think . . . you think you're going to treat me like that, me, me? . . . No, never. . . . And for whose sake, for whose sake? . . . For that snotty brat who isn't even your own child! No . . . not yours! . . . No! not yours! . . . not yours! . . . not yours! Why, everybody knows it, by God, except you. . . . Ask the grocer, the butcher, the baker, every one, every one. . . ."

She faltered, choked with anger, then was silent and looked at him.

He did not stir; livid, his arms waving wildly. At the end of several seconds he stammered in a feeble, tremulous voice, in which strong emotion still quivered:

"You say? . . . you say? . . . What do you say?"

Then she answered in a calmer voice:

"I say what I know, by God! What every one knows."

He raised his two hands and, flinging himself upon her with the fury of a brute beast, tried to fell her to the ground. But she was strong, in spite of her age, and agile too. She slipped through his arms and, running round the table, once more in a violent rage, screeched:

"Look at him, look at him, you fool, and see if he isn't the living image of Monsieur Duretourt; look at his nose and eyes,

are *your* eyes like that? Or your nose? Or your hair? And were *hers* like that? I tell you everybody knows it, everybody, except you! It's the laughing-stock of the town! Look at him! Look at him! . . ."

She passed in front of the door, opened it, and disappeared.

Jean, terrified, remained motionless, staring at his soup-plate.

At the end of an hour she returned, very softly, to see. The little one, after having devoured the cakes, a dish of custard, and a dish of pears in syrup, was now eating jam out of a pot with his soup-spoon.

The father had gone out.

Céleste took the child, embraced him, and, with silent steps, carried him off to his room and put him to bed. And she returned to the dining-room, cleared the table, and set everything in order, very uneasy in her mind.

No sound whatever was to be heard in the house. She went and set her ear to her master's door. He was not moving about the room. She set her eye to the keyhole. He was writing and seemed calm.

Then she went back to sit in her kitchen, so as to be ready for any circumstance, for she realised that something was in the air.

She fell asleep in her chair, and did not wake until daybreak.

She did the household work, as was her custom every morning; she swept and dusted, and, at about eight o'clock, made Monsieur Lemonnier's coffee.

But she dared not take it to her master, having very little idea how she would be received; and she waited for him to ring. He did not ring. Nine o'clock went by, then ten o'clock.

Céleste, alarmed, prepared the tray, and started off with a beating heart. In front of the door she stopped and listened. Nothing was stirring. She knocked, there was no answer.

So, summoning up all her courage, she opened the door and went in; then, uttering a terrible shriek, she dropped the breakfast-tray which she held in her hands.

Monsieur Lemonnier was hanging right in the middle of his room, suspended by the neck from a ring in the ceiling. His tongue protruded in ghastly fashion. The slipper had fallen off his right foot and lay on the floor; the other slipper had remained upon the foot. An overturned chair had rolled to the bedside.

Cécile, at her wits' end, fled shrieking. All the neighbours ran up. The doctor discovered that death had taken place at midnight.

A letter, addressed to Monsieur Duretour, was found upon the suicide's table. It contained this solitary line:

"I leave and entrust the little one to you."

GUILLEMOT ROCK

THIS IS THE SEASON FOR GUILLEMOTS.

From April until the end of May, before the bathers arrive from Paris, one may observe, at the little watering-place called Étretat, the sudden appearance of certain old gentlemen in top-boots and tight shooting-coats. They spend four or five days at the Hôtel Hanville, disappear, come again three weeks later ; then, after a second stay, depart for good.

The following spring, they appear again.

They are the last hunters of the guillemot, the survivors of those of the old days ; for thirty or forty years ago there were some twenty of these fanatics, but now they are but a few fanatical sportsmen.

The guillemot is a rare migrant whose habits are strange. For almost the whole of the year it lives in the neighbourhood of Newfoundland, and off the islands of Saint-Pierre and Miquelon ; but at the nesting season a band of migrants crosses the Atlantic and, every year, comes to lay its eggs and hatch them out on the same spot, the rock called Guillemot Rock, near Étretat. They are never to be found in any other spot than this. They have always come thither, they have always been shot, and they still keep coming back ; they always will come back. As soon as the young birds have been raised, they go away again, and disappear for a year.

Why do they never go elsewhere, choose some other point in the long white cliff, which runs unchanged from the Pas de Calais to Le Havre ? What force, what unconquerable instinct, what age-long custom impels these birds to return to this spot ? What was the manner of their first migration, or the nature of the tempest which may long since have cast their

sires upon this rock? And why have the children, the grandchildren, all the descendants of the first-comers, always returned thither?

They are not numerous; a hundred at the most, as though a solitary family possessed this tradition, performed this annual pilgrimage.

And every spring, as soon as the little wandering tribe is reinstalled upon its rock, the same hunters reappear in the village. Once, as young men, they were familiar to the inhabitants; to-day they are old, but still faithful to the regular meeting-place that for the past thirty or forty years they have appointed for their gathering.

For nothing in the world would they fail to keep the appointment.

It was an April evening in one of the last years. Three of the old guillemot-shooters had just arrived; one of them was missing, Monsieur d'Arnelles.

He had written to no one, given no news! But he was not dead, like so many others; it would have been known. At last, weary of waiting, the first-comers sat down to table; dinner was nearly over when a carriage rolled into the yard of the hostelry; and soon the late arrival entered.

He sat down, in excellent spirits, rubbing his hands, atc with a good appetite, and, as one of his companions expressed surprise at his wearing a frock-coat, replied calmly:

"Yes, I had not time to change."

They went to bed as soon as they rose from the table, for, in order to surprise the birds, it is necessary to start well before daybreak.

Nothing is pleasanter than this sport, this early morning expedition.

At three in the morning the sailors wake the sportsmen by throwing gravel at their window-panes. In a few minutes all

are ready and down on the shingle beach. Although no twilight is yet visible, the stars have paled a little ; the sea screams over the pebbles, the breeze is so cold that they shiver a little, despite their thick clothes.

Soon the two boats, pushed out by the men, rush down the slope of rounded pebbles, with a noise as of tearing canvas ; then they are swaying upon the first waves. The brown sails are hoisted up the masts, swell slightly, tremble, hesitate, and, bulging once more, round-bellied, sweep the tarred hulls away towards the wide opening down the river, dimly visible in the gloom.

The sky grows clear ; the darkness seems to melt away ; the coastline appears, still veiled in mist, the long white coastline, straight as a wall. They pass the Manne-Porte, an enormous arch through which a ship could go, double the point of La Courtine, run past the vale of Antifer and the cape of the same name ; and suddenly there rushes into sight a beach on which are hundreds of gulls. It is Guillemot Rock.

It is merely a small hump of cliff, and on the narrow ledges of rock the heads of birds are visible, watching the boats.

They are there, motionless, waiting, not daring as yet to fly away. Some, settled upon the extreme edges, look as though they are sitting on their hind parts, upright like bottles, for their legs are so short that, when they walk, they appear to be gliding on wheels, and, when they want to fly away, they are unable to start with a run, and are obliged to let themselves fall like stones, almost on top of the men watching for them.

They are aware of their weakness and the danger it entails, and do not readily decide to fly.

But the sailors begin to shout and beat the gunwales with the wooden thole-pins, and the birds, terrified, one by one launch out into the void, and drop to the very level of the waves ; then, their wings beating with swift strokes, they gather way, dart off, and reach the open spaces, unless a hail of shot casts them into the water.

For an hour they are slaughtered thus, one after another being forced to make off; and sometimes the females on their nests, utterly devoted to the business of hatching, refuse to leave, and ever and anon receive a volley which splashes their white plumage with spots of rosy blood, and the bird dies, still faithfully guarding her eggs.

On the first day, Monsieur d'Anelles shot with his customary enthusiasm; but, when they went off home at about ten o'clock, beneath the high and radiant sun which threw great triangles of light into the white clefts in the cliffs, he appeared somewhat distracted, and now and then he seemed lost in thought, unlike his usual self.

As soon as they were back on land, some sort of servant, clad in black, came and whispered with him. He appeared to reflect, to hesitate; then he replied:

"No, to-morrow."

And, next day, the shooting was resumed. This time Monsieur d'Anelles often missed his birds, though they let themselves fall almost on to the end of his gun-barrel, and his friends, laughing, asked him if he was in love, if any secret trouble were tormenting his heart and brain. At last he admitted it.

"Yes, as a matter of fact I must be off directly, and that's upsetting me."

"What, you're going away? Why?"

"Oh, urgent business. I can't stay any longer."

Then they began to talk of other things.

As soon as lunch was over, the servant in black reappeared. Monsieur d'Anelles ordered him to harness the horses, and the fellow was on the point of going out when the three other sportsmen intervened, insisting on an explanation, with many entreaties and demands that their friend should stay.

At last one of them said:

"But, look here, this business of yours can't be so very serious, if you've already waited two days."

The fourth, altogether perplexed, reflected, plainly a prey to conflicting ideas, torn between pleasure and duty, unhappy and ill at ease.

After a long period of meditation, he murmured with some hesitation :

" You see . . . you see, I am not alone here ; I have my son-in-law with me."

There were cries and exclamations.

" Your son-in-law ? . . . But where is he ? "

At that he appeared suddenly confounded, and blushed.

" What ? Didn't you know ? Why . . . why . . . he is out in the barn. He's dead."

Stupefied silence reigned.

More and more distressed, Monsieur d'Anelles continued :

" I have had the misfortune to lose him ; and, as I was taking the body to my home at Briseville, I made a slight detour just to keep our appointment here. But you will realise that I can delay no longer."

Then one of the sportsmen, bolder than the rest, suggested :

" But . . . since he is dead . . . it seems to me . . . that he might very well wait one more day."

The two others hesitated no longer.

" You can't deny that," they said.

Monsieur d'Anelles seemed relieved of a great weight, but, still somewhat uneasy, he inquired :

" You . . . you honestly think . . . ? "

As one man, the three others replied :

" Dash it all ! dear boy, two days more or less won't make any difference to him in his condition."

Thereupon, perfectly at ease, the father-in-law turned round to the undertaker.

" Very well, my good man, let it be the day after to-morrow."

TIMBUCTOO

THE BOULEVARD, THAT RIVER OF LIFE, SWARMED WITH PEOPLE in the golden dust of the setting sun. The whole sky was a blinding red ; and, behind the Madeleine, an immense blazing cloud flung along the great avenue an oblique shower of fire, quivering like the vapour above a brazier.

The gay, throbbing crowd went by under this flaming mist, and seemed transfigured. Faces were gilded, black hats and clothes took on purple gleams ; the polish on their shoes darted flames across the asphalt pavement.

In front of the cafés a throng of men were drinking gleaming, coloured beverages, which looked like precious stones melted into the crystal.

In this crowd of people with their light or sombre clothes, sat two officers in full uniform, and the dazzling brilliance of their gold lace made every eye glance at them. They were talking gaily and aimlessly, in the midst of all this radiant, vibrant life, in the glowing splendour of the evening ; and they were watching the throng, the sauntering men and the hurrying women who left behind them a divine and disquieting perfume.

Suddenly an enormous negro, dressed in black, pot-bellied, bedizened with trinkets on his waistcoat of ticking, his face shining as though it had been polished with blacking, passed in front of them with an air of triumph. He laughed at the passers-by, he laughed at the newspaper-vendors, he laughed at the blazing sky, he laughed at the whole of Paris. He was so tall that his head overtopped all others ; and, behind him, all the loungers turned round to stare at his back.

But suddenly he caught sight of the officers, and, jostling through the crowd of drinkers, he rushed up to them. As

soon as he was in front of their table, he fixed his gleaming, delighted eyes upon them, and the corners of his mouth rose to his ears, disclosing his white teeth, bright as a crescent moon in a black sky. The two men, bewildered, stared at this ebony giant, unable to make head or tail of his merriment.

And he cried out, in a voice which drew a burst of laughter from every table :

"Mawnin', Lieutenant."

One of the officers was a lieutenant-colonel, the other a colonel. The former said :

"I don't know you, sir. I am quite unable to imagine what you want of me."

The negro replied :

"Me like you much, Lieutenant Védié, siege of Bèzi, we hunt much grapes."

The officer, quite at a loss, stared fixedly at the fellow, groping in the depths of his memory ; and exclaimed abruptly :

"Timbuctoo !"

The negro, radiant, smacked his thigh, uttered a laugh of unbelievable violence, and roared :

"Ya, ya, my Lieutenant, remember Timbuctoo, ya, mawnin' !"

The Major gave him his hand, laughing heartily himself. Then Timbuctoo became serious again. He took the officer's hand and, so swiftly that the other could not prevent him, he kissed it, according to the custom of the negroes and the Arabs. The embarrassed officer said to him in a severe voice :

"Come, Timbuctoo, we are not in Africa. Sit down there and tell me how it is that I find you here."

Timbuctoo stretched his paunch, and, speaking so fast that he stammered, announced :

"Make much money, very much, big rest'rant, good eat, Prussians, me, steal much, very much, F'ench cooking, me get hund'ed thousand f'ancs. Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha !"

And he writhed with laughter, bellowing with a gleam of mad merriment in his eyes.

When the officer, who understood his strange language, had questioned him for some time, he said to him :

" Well, good-bye, Timbuctoo ; see you again soon."

The negro promptly rose, shook, this time, the outstretched hand, and, still laughing, exclaimed :

" Mawnin', mawnin', Lieutenant ! "

And he departed, so happy that he gesticulated as he walked, and the crowd took him for a lunatic.

" Who was that brute ? " inquired the Colonel.

" A good lad and a good soldier," replied the Major.

" I will tell you what I know about him ; it is funny enough.

" You know that at the beginning of the war of 1870 I was shut up in Bézières, the place the negro calls Bézi. We were not besieged, but blockaded. The Prussian lines surrounded us on every side, out of range of cannon-shot, and not firing on us, but gradually starving us out.

" I was a lieutenant at the time. Our garrison was composed of troops of every sort, the remnants of decimated regiments, fugitives and marauders separated from their army corps. We even had eleven Turcos, who arrived one evening, no one knows how or whence. They had turned up at the gates of the town, worn out, ragged, starving, and drunk. They were entrusted to me.

" I very soon realised that they detested every form of discipline ; they were always getting out of the town, and were always drunk. I tried the police station, even a dose of prison ; nothing did any good. My men would disappear for whole days, as though they had burrowed underground, and then would reappear so tipsy that they could not stand. They had no money. Where did they drink ? And how, and by what means ?

" The problem began to fascinate me, especially as these

savages interested me, with their perpetual laugh and their natures of overgrown, naughty boys.

"I noticed at last that they obeyed blindly the biggest of the lot; the one you have just seen. He ruled them absolutely as he chose, and prepared their mysterious enterprises with the undisputed authority of an omnipotent chief. I made him come and see me, and questioned him. Our conversation lasted a good three hours, so much trouble did it take me to comprehend his surprising rigmarole. As for him, poor devil, he made the most extraordinary efforts to be understood, invented words, gesticulated, perspired with the effort, wiped his brow, panted, stopped, and abruptly began again when he fancied he had discovered a new means of explaining himself.

"Eventually I gathered that he was the son of a great chief, a sort of negro king in the neighbourhood of Timbuctoo. I asked him his name. He answered something like 'Chavaharibouhalikhiranafotapolarara.' I thought it simpler to give him the name of his country: 'Timbuctoo.' And a week later the entire garrison knew him by no other name.

"But we were consumed by a frantic desire to know how this African ex-prince managed to get hold of drink. I discovered it in strange fashion.

"I was on the ramparts one morning, scanning the horizon, when I saw something moving in a vineyard. It was getting near the vintage season, and the grapes were ripe, but I never thought of that. I imagined that a spy was approaching the town, and I organised an entire expedition to seize the prowler. I took command myself, after getting permission from the General.

"I had sent out, through three different gates, three little bands which were to meet near the suspected vineyard and surround it. In order to cut off the spy's retreat, one of the detachments had to march for a good hour. A man who remained on the watch upon the walls indicated to me by signs that the fellow I had noticed had not left the field. We

went on our way in complete silence, crawling, almost lying flat in the ruts. At last we reached the appointed spot; swiftly I deployed my men, who dashed into the vineyard and found . . . Timbuctoo, going on all fours through the middle of vines, and eating the grapes, or rather lapping them up like a dog lapping soup, taking them straight off the plants in large mouthfuls, tearing down the bunches with his teeth.

"I tried to make him stand up, it was not to be dreamed of, and I realised then why he was crawling thus on his hands and knees. Set on his legs, he tottered for a few seconds, threw out his arms, and fell flat on his nose. I have never seen a man so drunk as he was.

"He was carried home on two vine-poles. He never stopped laughing all the way back, and waved his arms and legs.

"That was the whole mystery. My rascals drank from the grape itself. Then, when they were so tight that they could not move, they went to sleep where they were.

"As for Timbuctoo, his love of the vines passed all belief and measure. He lived among them like the thrushes, which, by the way, he hated with the hatred of a jealous rival. He repeated constantly:

"'Th'ushes eat all the g'apes, d'unkards!'

"One evening I was sent for. Something was seen approaching us across the plain. I had not brought my spyglass, and could make out very little. It was like a great serpent uncoiling, a convoy, I don't know what.

"I sent some men forward to meet this strange caravan, which soon made its triumphal entry. Timbuctoo and nine of his comrades were carrying, upon a kind of altar made of rustic chairs, eight severed heads, bleeding and grimacing. The tenth Turco was leading a horse, to whose tail a second was attached, and six more animals followed, secured in the same fashion.

"This is what I learned. Setting off to the vineyards, my Africans had suddenly noticed a Prussian detachment drawing near to a village. Instead of fleeing, they hid; then, when the officers had dismounted in front of an inn, in search of refreshments, the gallant eleven charged, put to flight the Uhlans, who thought they were seriously attacked, and killed the two sentries, in addition to the Colonel and the five officers with him.

"That day I embraced Timbuctoo. But I noticed that he found difficulty in walking. I thought he was wounded; he burst out laughing, and told me:

"'Me, p'ovisions for count'y.'

"For Timbuctoo had no idea of going to war for glory; he did it for profit. Everything he found, everything which appeared to him to have any value, everything, especially, which sparkled, he thrust into his pocket. And what a pocket! It was a gulf which began at his hip and ended at his ankle. He had picked up a piece of army slang, and called it his 'deep,' and deep it was, in very truth!

"He had consequently stripped off the gilt from the Prussian uniforms, the brass from their helmets, the buttons, etc., and thrown the whole collection into his 'deep,' which was full to overflowing.

"Every day he cast into it every shining object which caught his eye, pieces of tin or silver coins; the outline of his figure became remarkably quaint.

"He was determined to carry it all back to the land of ostriches, whose brother this king's son seemed to be in his devouring passion for acquiring glittering articles. If he had not had his 'deep,' what would he have done? Doubtless he would have swallowed them.

"Every morning his pocket was empty. He must have had a central dump where his riches were heaped together. But where was it? I was never able to find out.

"The General, informed of Timbuctoo's great feat, ordered

the bodies which had been left in the neighbouring village to be buried at once, so that it might not be discovered that they had been decapitated. The Prussians returned there the next day. The mayor and seven prominent residents were shot on the spot by way of reprisals, for having given away the presence of the Germans.

"Winter had come. We were worn out and desperate. We fought now every day. The famished men could no longer march. Only the eight Turcos (three had been killed) remained fat and glossy, vigorous and always ready for a fight. Timbuctoo was positively growing fatter. One day he said to me :

" 'You, much lung'y, me good meat.'

"And, as a matter of fact, he did bring me an excellent steak. But of what? We had no more cows, sheep, goats, donkeys, or pigs. It was impossible to get horseflesh. I thought of all this after I had eaten the meat. It was then that a horrible thought came to me. These negroes had been born very near the district where men are eaten! And every day so many soldiers were slain in the town. I questioned Timbuctoo. He refused to answer. I did not insist, but from that time onward I refused his presents.

"He adored me. One night we were caught in a snowstorm out at the advanced pickets. We were sitting on the ground. I cast looks of pity on the poor negroes shivering under the white, frozen dust. As I was very cold myself, I began to cough. I instantly felt something fall on me, like a large, warm covering. It was Timbuctoo's coat which he was throwing over my shoulders.

"I rose and, giving him back his garment, said :

" 'Keep that, my lad ; you need it more than I do.'

" 'No,' he replied, 'for you, Lieutenant ; me not need, me warm, warm.'

"And he looked at me with entreaty in his eyes.

" 'Come now, obey me,' I went on. 'Keep your coat; I wish you to.'

"Thereupon the negro rose, drew his sabre, which he knew how to make as sharp as a scythe, and holding in his other hand the wide cloak which I would not take, declared :

" 'If you not keep coat, me cut; nobody have coat.'

"He would have done it. I gave in.

"Eight days later we had capitulated. Some of us had been able to escape. The rest were about to march out of the town and surrender to the victors.

"I directed my steps towards the Place d'Armes, where we were to muster, when I stopped, bewildered with amazement, in front of a gigantic negro clad in white duck, and wearing a straw hat. It was Timbuctoo. He looked radiant, and was walking to and fro with his hands in his pockets, in front of a small shop in whose window were displayed two plates and two glasses.

" 'What are you doing?' I said to him.

" 'Me not gone,' he replied. 'Me good cook, me make eat Colonel, Alge'ia; me eat P'ussians, steal much, much.'

"There were ten degrecs of frost. I shivered at sight of this duck-clad negro. Then he took my arm and made me go inside. I noticed an enormous sign, which he was going to hang up at his door as soon as we were gone, for he had some traces of shame.

"And I read, traced by the hand of some accomplice, the following announcement :

M. TIMBUCTOO'S MILITARY KITCHEN
LATE COOK TO H.M. THE EMPEROR
PARISIAN ARTIST — MODERATE PRICES

"In spite of the despair gnawing at my heart, I could not help laughing, and I left my negro to his new profession.

"Was it not better than having him taken prisoner?"

"You have just seen that the rascal has succeeded.

"To-day Béziers belongs to Germany. The Restaurant Timbuctoo is the beginning of our revenge."

A TRUE STORY

A GALE WAS BLOWING OUT OF DOORS ; THE AUTUMN WIND moaned and careered round the house, one of those winds which kill the last leaves and carry them off into the clouds.

The shooting-party were finishing their dinner, still in their boots, flushed, animated, and inflamed. They were Normans, of a class between the nobles and the yeomen, half country-squires, half peasants, rich and strong, capable of breaking the horns of the bulls when they catch hold of them at fairs.

All day long they had been shooting over the land of Maître Blondel, the mayor of Éparville, and were now at their meal round the large table, in the sort of half farmhouse, half country-seat owned by their host.

They spoke as ordinary men shout, laughed like wild beasts roaring, and drank like cisterns, their legs outstretched, their elbows on the table-cloth, their eyes shining beneath the flame of the lamps, warmed by a huge fire which cast blood-coloured gleams over the ceiling ; they were talking of shooting and of dogs. But they had reached the period when other ideas come into the heads of half-drunk men, and all eyes were turned on a sturdy, plump-cheeked girl who was carrying the great dishes of food in her red hands.

Suddenly a hefty fellow, named Séjour, who, after studying for the Church, had become a veterinary surgeon, and looked after all the animals in the locality, exclaimed :

“ By Gad, Blondel, there’s no flies on that filly you’ve got there ! ”

There was a resounding laugh. Then an old nobleman, Monsieur de Vernetot, who had lost caste through taking to drink, lifted up his voice :

"Once upon a time I had a funny affair with a girl like that. I really must tell you the tale. Whenever I think of it, it reminds me of Mirza, the bitch I sold to the Comte d'Haussonnel: she returned every day as soon as she was unchained, she found it so hard to leave me. In the end I grew angry, and asked the Comte to keep her chained up. Well, do you know what the poor beast did? She died of grief.

"But, to return to my maid, here's the story.

"I was twenty-five at the time, and was living a bachelor life on my Villebon estate. When a man's young, you know, and has money, and bores himself to tears every evening after dinner, he keeps his eyes open on every side.

"I soon discovered a young thing in service with Déboultot of Canville. You knew Déboultot, Blondel, didn't you? In short, the hussy took my fancy to such an extent that one day I went off to see her master, and suggested a bit of business to him. He was to let me have his servant, and I was to sell him my black mare, Cocote, which he'd been wanting for close on two years. He gave me his hand, with a 'Put it there, Monsieur de Varnetot.' The bargain was struck, the little girl came to my house, and I myself took my mare to Canville and let her go for three hundred crowns.

"At first everything went swimmingly. No one suspected anything; the only thing was that Rose loved me a little too much for my liking. She wasn't of the common stock, I tell you. There was no ordinary blood in her veins; it must have come from some other girl who went wrong with her master.

"In short, she adored me. It was all coaxing and billing and cooing, and calling me pet names as if I were her little dog; so many pretty loving ways that I began to think rather seriously.

"I said to myself: 'This mustn't go on, or I'll let myself be caught.' But I'm not easily caught, I'm not. I'm not the sort of fellow to be wheedled with a couple of kisses. In

fact, my eyes were very much open, when she told me that she was in the family way.

“Crash! Bang! It was as though someone had fired a couple of shots into my chest. And she kissed me, kissed me and laughed and danced, fairly off her head with delight! I said nothing the first day, but I reasoned it out at night. ‘Well, that’s that,’ I thought, ‘but I must avoid the worst and cut her adrift; it’s high time.’ You see, my father and mother were at Barneville, and my sister, who was the wife of the Marquis d’Yspare, at Rollebec, two leagues from Villebon. I couldn’t take any chances.

“But how was I to extricate myself? If she left the house, suspicions would be aroused, and people would talk. If I kept her, the cat would soon be out of the bag; and besides, I could not let her go like that.

“I spoke about it to my uncle, the Baron de Créteil, an old buck who had had more than one such experience, and asked him for a word of advice. He replied calmly:

“‘You must get her married, my boy.’

“I jumped.

“‘Get her married, Uncle! But to whom?’

“He quietly shrugged his shoulders:

“‘Anyone you like; that’s your business, and not mine. If you’re not a fool, you can always find someone.’

“I thought over this advice for a good week, and ended by saying to myself: ‘My uncle’s quite right.’

“So I began to rack my brains and search for a man; when, one evening the justice of the peace, with whom I had been dining, told me:

“‘Old Mother Paumelle’s son has just been up to his larks again; he’ll come to a bad end, will that boy. It’s true enough that like father like son.’

“This Mother Paumelle was a sly old thing whose own youth had left something to be desired. For a crown she would

assuredly have sold her soul, and her lout of a son into the bargain.

"I went to find her, and, very carefully, I made her understand the situation.

"As I was becoming embarrassed in my explanations, she suddenly asked me :

" ' And what are you going to give the girl ? ' "

"She was a cunning old thing, but I was no fool, and had made all my preparations.

"I had just three little bits of land away out near Sasseville, which were let out from my three Villebon farms. The farmers were always complaining that they were a long way off ; to make a long story short, I had taken back these three fields, six acres in all, and, as my peasants were making an outcry about it, I let them all off their dues in poultry until the end of each lease. By this means I put the business through all right. Then I bought a strip from my neighbour, Monsieur d'Aumonté, and had a cottage built on it, all for fifteen hundred francs. In this way I made a little bit of property which did not cost me much, and I gave it to the girl as a dowry.

"The old woman protested : this was not enough ; but I held to it, and we parted without settling anything.

"Early next morning the lad came to see me. I had almost forgotten what he looked like. When I saw him, I was reassured ; he wasn't so bad for a peasant ; but he looked a pretty dirty scoundrel.

"He took a detached view of the affair, as though he had come to buy a cow. When we had come to terms, he wanted to see the property, and off we went across the fields. The rascal kept me out there a good three hours ; he surveyed the land, measured it, and took up sods and crushed them in his hands, as though he were afraid of being cheated over the goods. The cottage was not yet roofed, and he insisted on slate instead of thatch, because it required less upkeep !

"Then he said to me :

“ ‘ But what about the furniture ? You’re giving that ! ’

“ ‘ Certainly not,’ I protested ; ‘ it’s very good of me to give you the farm.’

“ ‘ Not half,’ he sniggered ; ‘ a farm and a baby.’

“ I blushed in spite of myself.

“ ‘ Come,’ he continued, ‘ you’ll give the bed, a table, the dresser, three chairs, and the crockery, or there’s nothing doing.’

“ I consented.

“ And back we went. He had not yet said a word about the girl. But suddenly he asked, with a cunning, worried air :

“ ‘ But if she died, who would the stuff go to ? ’

“ ‘ Why, to you, of course,’ I replied.

“ That was all he had wanted to find out that morning. He promptly offered me his hand with a gesture of satisfaction. We were agreed.

“ But, oh ! I had some trouble to convince Rose, I can tell you. She grovelled at my feet, sobbed and repeated : ‘ You suggest this, you ! you ! ’ She held out for more than a week, in spite of my reasoning and my entreaties. Women are silly things ; once love gets into their heads, they can’t understand anything. Common sense means nothing to them : love before all, all for love !

“ At last I grew angry and threatened to turn her out. At that she gradually yielded, on condition that I allowed her to come and see me from time to time.

“ I myself led her to the altar, paid for the ceremony, and gave the wedding breakfast. I did the thing in style. Then it was : ‘ Good night, children ! ’ I went and spent six months with my brother in Touraine.

“ When I returned, I learnt that she had come to the house every week and asked for me. I hadn’t been back an hour when I saw her coming with a brat in her arms. Believe me or not, as you like, but it meant something to me to see that little mite. I believe I even kissed it.

"As for the mother, she was a ruin, a skeleton, a shadow. Thin, and grown old. By God, marriage didn't suit her!

"'Are you happy?' I inquired mechanically.

"At that she began to cry like a fountain, hiccuping and sobbing, and exclaimed:

"'I can't, I can't live without you, now! I'd rather die! I can't!'

"She made the devil of a noise. I consoled her as best I could, and led her back to the gate.

"I found out that her husband beat her, and that the old harpy of a mother-in-law made life hard for her.

"Two days later she came back again; she took me in her arms and grovelled on the ground.

"'Kill me, but I won't go back there any more,' she implored. Exactly what Mirza would have said if she had spoken!

"All this fuss was beginning to get on my nerves, and I cleared out for another six months. When I returned . . . when I returned, I learnt that she had died three weeks before, after having come back to the house every Sunday . . . still just like Mirza. The child too had died eight days later.

"As for the husband, the cunning rascal, he came into the inheritance. He's done well for himself since, so it seems; he's a town councillor now."

Then Monsieur de Varnetot added with a laugh:

"Anyhow, I made his fortune for him."

And Monsieur Séjour, the veterinary surgeon, raising a glass of brandy to his lips, gravely concluded the story with:

"Say what you like, but there's no place in this world for that sort of woman!"

FAREWELL

THE TWO FRIENDS WERE FINISHING DINNER. FROM THE CAFÉ window they saw the boulevard, covered with people. They felt the caress of the warm airs that drift through Paris on calm summer nights, making a man raise his eyes towards the passers-by, rousing in him a desire to get away, far away to some distant place, no one knows where, under green leaves ; making him dream of moonlit rivers and glow-worms and nightingales.

One of the two, Henri Simon, sighing deeply, said :

" Ah ! I'm getting old. It's sad. Once, on nights like this, I felt the devil in my bones. To-day I feel nothing but regrets. Life goes so fast ! "

He was already somewhat fat, aged perhaps forty-five, and very bald.

The other, Pierre Carnier, a shade older, but slimmer and more lively, replied :

" As for me, my dear chap, I've grown old without noticing it in the least. I was always a gay dog, a jolly fellow, vigorous and all that. But when a man looks in his mirror every day, he does not see old age doing its work, for it is slow and regular, and changes the face so gradually that the transitions are imperceptible. That is the only reason why we do not die of grief after only two or three years of its ravages. For we cannot appreciate them. In order to realise them, we should have to go without looking at our faces for six months on end—then what a blow it would be !

" And women, my dear chap, how sorry I am for the poor things ! The whole of their happiness, the whole of their power, the whole of their lives, lies in their beauty, which lasts ten years.

"Well, I have grown old without suspecting it, and thought myself almost an adolescent when I was nearly fifty. Not feeling within myself any infirmity of any sort, I went on my way, happy and care-free.

"The revelation of decay came to me in a simple but terrible manner, and prostrated me for nearly six months . . . then I resigned myself to my lot.

"I have often been in love, like all men, but once more than usual.

"I met her at the seaside, at Étretat, about twelve years ago now, shortly after the war. There is nothing so charming as the beach there, in the morning, at the bathing-hour. It is small, curved like a horseshoe, framed in the high white cliffs pierced with those curious holes known as the Gates, one very large, stretching its gigantic limb into the sea, the other opposite it, low and round; the crowd of women gathers together within the frame of high rocks, thronging the narrow tongue of shingle, covering it with a brilliant garden of bright rocks. The sun falls full upon the slopes, on sunshades of every hue, on the greenish-blue sea; everything is gay and charming, a smiling scene. You go and sit right at the edge of the water, and watch the ladies bathing. They come down the beach draped in a flannel wrap which they cast off with a pretty gesture as they reach the foamy fringe of the small waves; and go into the sea with swift little steps, sometimes interrupted by a shiver of delicious cold, a brief catching of the breath.

"Very few stand this bathing-test. There they can be judged, from the calf to the throat. Above all, when they leave the water, their weaknesses are plain to see; although the sea-water is a powerful stimulant to flabby bodies.

"The first time that I saw this young woman under these conditions, I was ravished and seduced. She stood the test triumphantly. There are faces, too, whose charm comes home to us instantaneously, conquers us at sight. We think we have

found the woman we were born to love. I suffered that sensation, that shock of emotion.

"I got an introduction to her, and was soon caught as I had never been. She played havoc with my heart. It is a dreadful and glorious experience thus to submit oneself to a woman's power. It is almost a torture, and, at the same time, an incredible happiness. Her look, her smile, the hair on the nape of her neck lifted by the breeze, all the tiniest lines of her face, the faintest movements of her features, ravished me, overwhelmed me, and maddened me. She possessed me with the whole of herself, her gestures, her attitudes, even the clothes she wore, which acquired magical powers. I thrilled at the sight of her veil on a piece of furniture, or her glove thrown down on an arm-chair. Her dresses seemed to me inimitable. No woman's hats were as delightful as hers.

"She was married, but the husband came down every Saturday and went away again on the Monday. In other respects he left me quite indifferent. I was not in the least jealous, I do not know why; never has any human being seemed to me of less importance in life, or occupied less of my attention, than that man.

"How I loved her! And how beautiful she was, how graceful and young! She was youth, elegance, and freshness personified. I had never really felt what a pretty creature a woman is, how fine, distinguished, and delicate, fashioned of charm and grace. I had never realised the seductive beauty that lies in the curve of a cheek, in the quiver of a lip, in the round folds of a little ear, in the shape of the absurd organ we call a nose.

"It lasted three months, and then I went off to America, my heart crushed with despair. But the thought of her dwelt with me, persistent, triumphant. She possessed me from the distance as she had possessed me close at hand. Years passed. I never forgot her. The charming image of her remained before my eyes and in my heart. And my affec-

tion for her remained faithful, a calm affection now, a feeling like the loved remembrance of all that was most beautiful and seductive in my experience of life.

"Twelve years are so little in the life of a man ! He never feels them pass ! They go by one after the other, gently and swiftly, slow and hurried, each so long, and yet so soon finished ! And they add up together so promptly, leave so little trace behind them, fade so utterly that when he turns to look at the time that has run by he sees nothing, and cannot understand how it has come about that he is old.

"It really seemed to me as though a mere few months separated me from that charming season on the beach at Étretat.

"Last spring I went to dine with some friends of mine at Maisons-Laffitte.

"Just as the train was starting, a stout lady got into my compartment, escorted by four little girls. I scarcely troubled to glance at this mother-hen with her brood, very wide and very round, her full-moon face framed in a ribbon-decked hat.

"She breathed hard, out of breath after walking fast. The children began to chatter. I opened my paper and began to read.

"We had just gone through Asnières when my neighbour suddenly said to me :

" 'Excuse me, Monsieur, but are you not Monsieur Carnier ?' "

" 'Yes, Madame.' "

"Then she began to laugh, with the happy laughter of a contented woman, yet with a touch of sadness in it.

" 'You do not recognise me ?' "

"I hesitated. I certainly thought I had seen that face somewhere ; but where ? When ?

" 'Yes . . . and no . . .' I replied. 'I certainly know you, but I can't think of your name.' "

"She blushed slightly, and said :

“ ‘Madame Julie Lefèvre.’

“ I had never had such a shock. In a single instant I felt as though all were over with me ! I felt that a veil had been torn from before my eyes, and that I was on the point of making frightful and heart-rending discoveries.

“ This was she ! Thus fat, ordinary woman, she ? And she had hatched out these four daughters since I had last seen her. The little creatures caused me more astonishment than their mother herself. They had come from her body ; they were already big ; they had taken their place in life. While she no longer counted, she, that marvel of fascinating exquisite grace. I had seen her only yesterday, it seemed, and now had found her thus ! Was it possible ? Violent grief oppressed my heart, and a protest, too, against Nature herself, an unreasoning exasperation at this brutal, infamous work of destruction.

“ I looked at her in awe. Then I took her hand, and tears came into my eyes. I wept for her youth, I wept for her death. For I did not know this fat woman.

“ She, also affected, faltered :

“ ‘ I am greatly changed, am I not ? But time goes by, doesn’t it ? You see, I have become a mother, just a mother, a good mother. Farewell to the rest, it is all over. Oh ! I thought you would not recognise me if we ever met. And you have changed too ; it took me some time to be sure that I was not making a mistake. You’ve gone quite white. Think of it ; it is twelve years ago ! Twelve years ! My eldest girl is ten already.’

“ I looked at the child. And I found in her something of her mother’s old charm, but as yet a sense of immaturity, of something early and unformed. And life seemed to me swift as a passing train.

“ We arrived at Maisons-Laffitte. I kissed my old friend’s hand. I had found nothing to say to her but the most appalling commonplaces. I was too overcome to speak.

“ That evening, when all alone in my house, I looked for a long time into the mirror, a long, long time, and I ended by recalling myself as I had been, by seeing again, in my mind’s eye, my brown moustache and my black hair, and the youthful outlines of my face. Now I was old. Farewell.”

A MEMORY

HOW MANY MEMORIES OF MY YOUTH CAME TO ME UNDER THE gentle caress of the earliest summer sun ! It is an age wherein all is good, glad, charming, and intoxicating. How exquisite are the memories of lost springs !

Do you recall, my old friends, my brothers, those years of gladness in which life was but triumph and laughter ? Do you recall the days when we roamed disreputably about Paris, our radiant poverty, our walks in the woods newly clad in green, our revels under the open sky outside the taverns on the banks of the Seine, and our love adventures, so commonplace and so delicious ?

I should like to relate one of those adventures. It dates from twelve years ago, and already feels so old, so old, that it seems now at the other end of my life, before the turning, the ugly turning whence suddenly I saw the end of the journey.

I was twenty-five in those days. I had just come to Paris ; I worked in a government office, and Sundays seemed to me extraordinary festivals, full of exuberant happiness, although nothing remarkable ever happened on them.

Every day is Sunday now. But I regret the times when I had only one a week. How good it was ! I had six francs to spend !

I awoke early, that particular morning, with that feeling of freedom well known to clerks, the feeling of deliverance, rest, tranquillity, and independence.

I opened my window. The weather was glorious. The clear blue sky was spread above the city, full of sunsline and swallows.

I dressed very quickly and went out, eager to spend the

day in the woods, to breathe the odour of the leaves ; for I come off country stock, and spent my childhood on the grass and under the trees.

joyfully, in the warmth and the light.

Houses shone, the concierges' canaries sang furiously in their cages, and gaiety ran down the street, lighting up faces and stirring laughter everywhere, as though a mysterious happiness filled all animate and inanimate life in that radiant dawn.

I reached the Seine, to catch the *Swallow*, which was to take me to Saint-Cloud.

How I loved waiting for the boat upon the landing-stage ! I felt as though I were off to the end of the world, to new and wonderful countries. I watched the boat come into sight, away in the distance under the arch of the second bridge, very small, with a plume of smoke, then larger, larger, always growing ; and to my mind it took on the airs and graces of a liner.

It came alongside the stage, and I embarked.

A crowd of people in their Sunday clothes were already on board, with gay dresses, brilliantly coloured ribbons, and fat scarlet faces. I placed myself right in the bows, and stood there watching quays, trees, houses, and bridges go by. And suddenly I saw the great viaduct of Point-du-Jour barring the stream. It was the end of Paris, the beginning of the country, and at once beyond the double line of arches the Seine widened out, although liberty had been granted to it, becoming suddenly the lovely, peaceful river that flows on across the plain, at the foot of the wooded hills, through the meadows, and along the edge of the forest.

After passing between two islands, the *Swallow* followed the curve of a slope whose green expanse was covered with fields. A voice announced : " Bas-Meudon " ; then, farther on : " Sures," and, still farther on : " Saint-Cloud."

I disembarked. And I hurried through the little town

along the road to the woods. I had brought a map of the surroundings of Paris, lest I lost myself on the paths which run in every direction across the woods where the people of Paris go for their expeditions.

As soon as I was in the shade, I studied my route, which seemed perfectly simple. I was to turn to the right, then to the left, then to the left again, and I should arrive at Versailles by nightfall, for dinner.

And I began to walk slowly, beneath the fresh leaves, drinking in the fragrant air, perfumed with the odour of buds and sap. I walked with short steps, unmindful of the stacks of old paper, of the office, of my chief and my colleagues, and of files, and dreaming of the happy adventures that must assuredly be waiting for me in the stretches of that veiled, unknown future. I was filled with a thousand memories of childhood awakened in me by the scents of the country, and I went on, sunk in the fragrant, living, throbbing loveliness of the woods, warmed by the powerful June sun.

Sometimes I sat down by a bank and looked at the little flowers of every kind, whose names I had long known. I knew them all again, just as though they were the very ones I had once seen in my own country. They were yellow, red, and violet, delicate and dainty, lifted on high stalks or huddled close to the earth. Insects of every colour and shape, short and squat or long and thin, extraordinary in their construction, frightful microscopic monsters, peacefully mounted the blades of grass, which bent under their weight.

Then I slept for some hours in a ditch, and went on again, rested and strengthened by my sleep.

In front of me opened a delightful alley, whose rather sparse leafage allowed drops of sunlight to shower everywhere upon the soil, and gleamed on the white daisies. It ran on endlessly, calm and empty. A solitary great hornet buzzed down it, pausing at times to sip a flower that stooped beneath it, and flying off again almost at once to come to rest again a little

farther on. Its fat body looked like brown velvet striped with yellow, borne on wings that were transparent and inordinately small.

Suddenly I saw at the end of the path two people, a man and a woman, coming towards me. Annoyed at being disturbed in my quiet walk, I was on the point of plunging into the undergrowth when I fancied I heard them calling to me. The woman was actually waving her sunshade, and the man, in his shirt-sleeves, his frock-coat over one arm, was raising the other as a signal of distress.

I went towards them. They were walking hurriedly, both very red, she with little rapid steps, he with long strides. Ill humour and weariness were visible on their faces.

The woman asked me at once :

"Monsieur, can you tell me where we are? My idiotic husband has lost us, after saying that he knew this district perfectly."

"Madame," I replied confidently, "you are going towards Saint-Cloud, and Versailles is behind you."

"What!" she continued, glancing with angry pity towards her husband. "Versailles is behind us? But that is precisely where we mean to have dinner!"

"So do I, Madame; I am going there."

"Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear!" she repeated, in the tone of overwhelming contempt with which women express their exasperation.

She was quite young, pretty, and dark, with a shadow of a moustache on her lip.

As for the man, he was perspiring and mopping his brow. Without doubt they were Parisian shopkeepers. The man looked overcome, tired out and miserable.

"But, my dear girl," he murmured, "it was you. . . ."

She did not permit him to finish the sentence.

"It was I! . . . Ah! it is I now. Was it I who wanted to go off without inquiries, declaring that I could always find

my way? Was it I who wanted to turn to the right at the top of the hill, declaring that I remembered the way? Was it I who undertook to look after Caehou. . . ."

She had not finished speaking when her husband, as though he had suddenly gone out of his mind, uttered a piercing cry, a long, wild cry, which cannot be written in any language, but which was something like *teeteeet*.

The young woman seemed neither surprised nor excited, and continued:

"No, upon my word, some people are too silly, always pretending to know everything. Was it I who took the Dieppe train last year instead of the Havre train? Tell me, was it I? Was it I who betted that Monsieur Letournier lived in the Rue des Martyrs? . . . Was it I who wouldn't believe that Céleste was a thief? . . ."

And she continued furiously, with amazing rapidity of speech, piling up the most heterogeneous, unexpected, and grievous charges, furnished by all the intimate situations in their existence together, blaming her husband for all his actions, ideas, manners, experiments, and efforts, his whole life, in fact, from their wedding day up to the present moment.

He tried to stop her, to calm her, and faltered:

"But, my dear girl . . . it's no use . . . in front of the gentleman . . . we're making an exhibition of ourselves. It is of no interest to the gentleman."

And he turned his melancholy eyes upon the thickets, as though eager to explore their peaceful and mysterious depths, to rush into them, escape and hide from every eye. From time to time he again uttered his cry, a prolonged, very shrill *teeteeet*. I imagined this habit was a nervous disorder.

The young woman abruptly turned to me and, changing her tone with remarkable rapidity, remarked:

"If Monsieur will be good enough to permit us, we will go with him, in order not to lose ourselves again and risk having to sleep in the wood."

I bowed ; she took my arm and began to talk of a thousand things, of herself, her life, her family, and her business. They kept a glove-shop in the Rue Saint-Lazare.

Her husband walked beside her, continually throwing wild glances into the thick of the trees, and every now and then shouting *teeteteet*.

At last I asked him :

" Why do you shout like that ? "

" It's my poor dog that I've lost," he replied with an air of consternation and despair.

" What ? You have lost your dog ? "

" Yes. He was barely a year old. He had never gone out of the shop. I wanted to take him for a walk in the woods. He had never seen grass or leaves before, and it pretty well sent him off his head. He began to run about, barking, and has disappeared in the forest. I should also tell you that he was very frightened of the railway ; it may have made him lose his senses. I have called and called in vain ; he has not come back. He will die of hunger in there."

Without turning towards her husband, the woman remarked :

" If you had kept him on the lead, it wouldn't have happened. People as silly as you have no business to have dogs."

" But, my dear girl, it was you. . . ."

She stopped short ; and looking into his eyes as though she were going to tear them out, she began once more her innumerable reproaches.

Night was falling. The veil of mist which covers the country-side at twilight was slowly unfolding ; romance hovered around, born of the strange, delightful coolness that fills the woods at the approach of night.

Suddenly the young man stopped, and, feeling about himself frantically, exclaimed :

" Oh ! I believe I have. . . ."

" Well, what ? " she asked, looking at him.

"I did not realize that I was carrying my frock-coat on my arm."

"Well?"

"I have lost my letter-case . . . my money is in it."

She quivered with rage and choked with indignation.

"That is the last straw. How idiotic you are, how perfectly idiotic! How can I have married such a fool? Well, go and look for it, and take care that you find it. I will go on to Versailles with this gentleman. I don't want to spend the night in the woods."

"Yes, dear," he replied meekly; "where shall I find you?"

A restaurant had been recommended to me. I told him of it.

The husband turned back and, bending down towards the ground, scanning it with anxious eyes, he walked away, continually shouting *teeteteet*.

It was a long time before he disappeared; the shades of evening, thicker now, obscured him at the far end of the path. Soon the outline of his body was seen no more, but for a long time we heard his melancholy *teeteteet*, *teeteteet*, becoming striller as the night grew darker.

As for me, I walked on with lively, happy steps through the sweetness of the twilight, with the unknown woman leaning on my arm.

I racked my brain in vain for compliments. I remained silent, excited and enraptured.

But suddenly a high road cut across our path. I saw that on the right, in a valley, there was quite a town.

What was this place?

A man was passing; I questioned him.

"Bougival," he replied.

I was thunderstruck.

"Bougival! Are you sure?"

"Damn it all, I live there!"

The little woman laughed uproariously.

I suggested taking a cab to Versailles.

"Certainly not!" she replied. "This is too funny, and I'm so hungry. I'm not a bit anxious; my husband will always find his way all right. It's a pleasure for me to be relieved of him for a few hours."

We accordingly entered a restaurant by the waterside, and I was bold enough to engage a private room.

She got thoroughly tipsy, I can assure you; sang, drank champagne, and did all sorts of crazy things . . . even the craziest of all.

That was my first adultery!

THE CONFESSION

MARGUERITE DE THÉRELLES WAS DYING. ALTHOUGH SHE was only fifty-six, she looked at least seventy-five. She was gasping, paler than her sheets, shaken with frightful shudders, her face distorted, her eyes haggard, as though they saw some frightful thing.

Her elder sister, Suzanne, who was six years older than she, was sobbing on her knees at the bedside. A little table had been drawn up to the dying woman's couch, and on the tablecloth stood two lighted candles, for they were waiting for the priest, who was to administer the extreme unction and the last sacrament.

The apartment wore the sinister aspect of all chambers of death, their air of despairing farewell. Medicine bottles stood on the tables, cloths lay about in corners, kicked or swept out of the way. The disordered chairs themselves looked frightened, as though they had run in every direction. For Death, the victor, was there, hidden, waiting.

The story of the two sisters was very touching. It had been told far and wide, and had filled many eyes with tears.

Suzanne, the elder, had once been deeply in love with a young man who loved her. They were betrothed, and were only awaiting the day fixed for the wedding, when Henry de Sampierre died suddenly.

The young girl's despair was terrible, and she declared that she would never marry. She kept her word. She put on widow's weeds and never gave them up.

Then her sister, her little sister Marguerite, who was only twelve years old, came one morning and threw herself into her elder sister's arms, saying :

"Sister, I don't want you to be unhappy. I don't want you to cry all your life long. I will never leave you, never, never! I won't marry either. I will stay with you for ever and ever."

Suzanne kissed her, touched by her childish devotion, believing in it not at all.

But the little sister kept her word, and, despite her parents' prayers and her sister's entreaties, she never married. She was pretty, very pretty; she refused several young men who seemed to love her; she never left her sister.

They lived together all the days of their lives, and were never parted. They lived side by side, inseparable. But Marguerite always seemed sad and depressed, more melancholy than the elder, as though crushed, perhaps, by her sublime self-sacrifice. She aged more rapidly, had white hair at the age of thirty, and, often ill, seemed the victim of some secret gnawing malady.

Now she was to be the first to die.

She had not spoken for twenty-four hours. She had only said, at the first glimmer of dawn:

"Go and fetch the priest; the time has come."

Since then she had lain still on her back, shaken with fits of shuddering, her lips trembling as though terrible words had risen from her heart and could not issue forth, her eyes wild with terror, a fearful sight.

Her sister, mad with grief, was crying brokenly, her forehead pressed against the edge of the bed, and repeating:

"Margot, my poor Margot, my little one!"

She had always called her "my little one," just as the younger had always called her "Sister."

Steps sounded on the staircase. The door opened. A choir-boy appeared, followed by the old priest in his surplice. As soon as she saw him, the dying woman sat up with a convulsive movement, opened her lips, babbled two or three

words, and fell to scraping her nails together as though she meant to make a hole in them.

The Abbé Simon went up to her, took her hand, kissed her on the brow, and said gently :

"God forgive you, my child ; be brave, the time has come : speak."

Then Marguerite, shivering from head to foot, shaking the whole bed with her nervous movements, stammered :

"Sit down, sister, and listen."

The priest bent down to Suzanne, still lying at the foot of the bed, raised her, placed her in an arm-chair, and, taking in each hand the hand of one of the sisters, murmured :

"O Lord God, give them strength, grant them Thy pity !"

And Marguerite began to speak. The words came from her throat one by one, hoarse, deliberate, as though they were very weary.

"Mercy, mercy, sister, forgive me ! Oh, if you knew how all my life I have dreaded this moment ! . . ."

"What have I to forgive you, little thing ?" stammered Suzanne, her tears choking her. "You have given me everything, sacrificed everything for me ; you are an angel."

But Marguerite interrupted her :

"Hush, hush ! Let me speak . . . do not stop me . . . it is horrible . . . let me tell all . . . the whole story, without faltering. . . . Listen. . . . You remember . . . you remember . . . Henry. . . ."

Suzanne shuddered and looked at her. The younger sister continued :

"You must hear it all, if you are to understand. I was twelve, only twelve, you remember that, don't you ? And I was spoilt, I did everything that came into my head ! . . . Don't you remember how spoilt I was ? . . . Listen. . . . The first time he came he wore high shining boots ; he dismounted in front of the steps, and he apologised for his clothes, saying

he had come with news for Father. You remember, don't you? . . . Don't speak . . . listen. When I saw him I was quite overcome, I thought him so handsome; and I remained standing in a corner of the drawing-room all the time he was speaking. Children are strange . . . and terrible. . . . Oh, yes . . . I have dreamed of it!

"He came back . . . many times. . . . I gazed at him with all my eyes, with all my soul. . . . I was big for my age . . . and far more sophisticated than people supposed. He came again often. . . . I thought of nothing but him. I used to repeat very softly: 'Henry . . . Henry de Sampierre!'

"Then they said that he was going to marry you. It was a sore grief to me, sister, oh, a sore, sore grief! I cried for three whole nights, without sleeping. He used to come every day, in the afternoon, after lunch, you remember, don't you? Don't speak . . . listen. You made him cakes, of which he was very fond . . . with flour, butter and milk. . . . Oh! I knew just how you made them. . . . I could make them this moment, if I had to. He would swallow them in a single mouthful, and then he would toss down a glass of wine . . . and then say: 'Delicious!' Do you remember how he used to say it?

"I was jealous, jealous. . . . The day of your wedding was drawing near. There was only a fortnight. I was going mad. I used to say to myself: 'He shall not marry Suzanne, no, I won't have it. . . . It is I who will marry him, when I am grown up. I shall never find a man I love so much.' . . . And then one evening, ten days before the wedding, you went out with him to walk in front of the house, in the moonlight . . . and out there . . . under the pine-tree, the big pine-tree . . . he kissed you . . . held you . . . in his arms . . . for such a long time. . . . You haven't forgotten, have you? . . . It may have been the first time . . . yes . . . you were so pale when you came back into the drawing-room!

"I saw you; I was there, in the copse. I grew wild with

rage! If I could have done it, I would have killed you both!

"I said to myself: 'He shall not marry Suzanne, never! He shall not marry anyone. . . . I should be too unhappy. . . .' Suddenly I began to hate him terribly.

"Do you know what I did then? . . . Listen. I had seen the gardener make little balls with which to kill stray dogs. He crushed a bottle with a stone, and put the ground glass in a little ball of meat.

"I took a little medicine-bottle from Mother's room. I smashed it up with a hammer, and hid the glass in my pocket. It was a glittering powder. . . . Next day, as soon as you had made the little cakes, I split them open with a knife and put the glass in. . . . He ate three of them . . . and I, too, ate one. . . . I threw the other six into the pond . . . the two swans died three days later. . . . Don't speak . . . listen, listen. I was the only one who did not die. . . . But I have always been ill . . . listen. . . . He died . . . you know . . . listen . . . that was nothing. . . . It was afterwards, later . . . always . . . that it was most terrible . . . listen. . . .

"My life, my whole life . . . what torture! I said to myself: 'I will never leave my sister. And I will tell her all, in the hour of my death.' . . . There! And since then I have thought every moment of this hour, the hour when I shall have to tell you all. . . . Now it has come . . . it is terrible. . . . Oh! . . . Sister!

"Every moment the thought has been with me, morning and evening, day and night: 'I shall have to tell her, some day. . . .' I waited. . . . What torment! . . . It is done. . . . Do not say anything. . . . Now I am afraid. . . . I am afraid. . . . Oh, I am afraid! If I were to see him again, presently, when I am dead . . . see him again . . . do you dream of seeing him? . . . See him before you do! . . . I shall not dare. . . . I must . . . I am going to die. . . . I want you to forgive me. I want you to. . . . Without it, I cannot come

into his presence. Oh, tell her to forgive me, Father, tell her. . . . I beg you. I cannot die without it. . . .”

She was silent, and lay panting, still clawing at the sheet with her shrivelled fingers. . . .

Suzanne had hidden her face in her hands, and did not stir. She was thinking of the man she might have loved so long ! What a happy life they would have had ! She saw him again, in the vanished long-ago, in the distant past for ever blotted out. Oh, beloved dead, how you tear our hearts ! Oh, that kiss, her only kiss ! She had kept it in her soul. And then, nothing more, nothing more in all her life ! . . .

Suddenly the priest stood up and cried out in a loud shaken voice :

“Mademoiselle Suzanne, your sister is dying !”

Then Suzanne let her hands fall apart and showed a face streaming with tears, and, falling upon her sister, she kissed her fiercely, stammering :

“I forgive you, I forgive you, little one. . . .”

A HUMBLE DRAMA

MEETINGS CONSTITUTE THE CHARM OF TRAVELLING. Who does not know the joy of coming, five hundred leagues from one's native land, upon a Parisian, a college friend, or a neighbour in the country? Who has not spent a night, unable to sleep, in the little jingling stage-coach of countries where steam is still unknown, beside a strange young woman, half seen by the gleam of the lantern when she clambered into the carriage at the door of a white house in a little town?

And, when morning comes, and brain and ears are still numbed by the perpetual ringing of the bells and the noisy clatter of the windows, how charming to see your pretty tousled neighbour open her eyes, look about her, arrange her rebellious tresses with the tips of her slim fingers, adjust her hat, feel with her skilful hand whether her corsets have not slipped, whether her person is as it should be, and her skirt not too crushed!

She gives you, too, a single cold, inquisitive glance. Then she settles herself into her corner and seems to have no eyes for anything but the landscape.

In spite of yourself, you stare at her all the time: you think of her the whole time in spite of yourself. What is she? Where has she come from? Where is she going to? In spite of yourself, you sketch a little romance in your mind. She is pretty; she seems charming! Happy man! . . . Life might be exquisite by her side. Who knows? Perhaps she is the woman necessary to our emotions, our dreams, our desires.

And how delicious, too, is the regret with which you see her get off at the gate of a country-house. A man is waiting

there with two children and two servants. He takes her in his arms and kisses her as he helps her down. She stoops and takes up the little ones who are stretching out their hands, and caresses them lovingly; they go off down a path while the maids take the boxes which the conductor is handing down from the roof.

Good-bye! It is finished. You will never see her again. Good-bye to the woman who has spent the night at your side. You never knew her, never spoke to her; still, you are a little sad when she goes. Good-bye!

I have many of these memories of travel, grave and gay.

I was in Auvergne, wandering on foot among those delightful French mountains, not too high, not too wild, but friendly and homely. I had climbed the Sancy, and was just going into a little inn, near a pilgrims' chapel named Notre Dame de Vassivière, when I noticed an old woman, a strange, absurd figure, lunching by herself at the table inside.

She was at least seventy, tall, withered, and angular, with white hair arranged in old-fashioned sausage curls on her temples. She was dressed in the quaint and clumsy style of the wandering Englishwoman, like a person to whom clothes were a matter of complete indifference; she was eating an omelette and drinking water.

She had an odd expression, with restless eyes, the face of one whom life has treated harshly. I stared at her in spite of myself, wondering: "Who is she? What sort of thing is this woman's life? Why is she wandering all alone in these mountains?"

She paid, then rose to go, readjusting upon her shoulders an extraordinary little shawl, whose two ends hung down over her arms. She took from a corner a long alpenstock covered with names engraved in the rusty iron, then walked out, straight and stiff, with the long strides of a postman setting off on his round.

A guide was waiting for her at the door. They moved off.

I watched them descend the valley, along the road indicated by a line of high wooden crosses. She was taller than her companion, and seemed to walk faster than he.

Two hours later I was climbing up the brim of that deep funnel in the heart of which, in a vast and wonderful green cavity filled with trees, bushes, rocks, and flowers, lies Lake Pavin, so round that it looks as though it had been made with a compass, so clear and blue that one might suppose it a flood of azure poured down from the sky, so charming that one would like to live in a hut on the slope of the wood overlooking this crater where, quiet and cool, the water sleeps.

She was standing there motionless, gazing at the transparent water lying at the bottom of the dead volcano. She was standing as though she would peer beneath it, into its unknown depths, peopled, it is said, by trout of monstrous size who have devoured all the other fish. As I passed close to her, I fancied that two tears welled in her eyes. But she walked away with long strides to rejoin her guide, who had stopped in a tavern at the foot of the rise leading to the lake.

I did not see her again that day.

Next day, as night was falling, I arrived at the castle of Murol. The old fortress, a giant tower standing upon a peak in the centre of a large valley, at the crossing of three dales, rises towards the sky, brown, crannied, and battered, but round from its broad circular base to the crumbling turrets of its summit.

It is more impressive than any other ruin in its simple bulk, its majesty, its ancient air of power and austerity. It stands there solitary, high as a mountain, a dead queen, but still a queen of the valleys crouching under it. The visitor approaches by a pine-clad slope, enters by a narrow door, and stops at the foot of the walls, in the first enclosure, high above the whole country-side.

Within are fallen rooms, skeleton staircases, unknown pits, subterranean chambers, oubliettes, walls cleft through the

middle, vaults still standing, none knows how, a maze of stones and crannies where grass grows and animals creep.

I was alone, roaming about this ruin.

Suddenly, behind a piece of wall, I caught sight of a human being, a sort of phantom, as if it were the spirit of the ancient ruined building.

I started in amazement, almost in terror. Then I recognised the old woman I had already met twice.

She was weeping. She was weeping big tears, and held her handkerchief in her hand.

I turned to go. She spoke to me, ashamed at having been discovered unawares.

"Yes, Monsieur, I am crying. . . . It does not happen often."

"Excuse me, Madame, for having disturbed you," I stammered in confusion, not knowing what to answer. "Doubtless you are the victim of some misfortune."

"Yes—no," she murmured, "I am like a lost dog."

And putting her handkerchief over her eyes, she burst into sobs.

I took her hands and tried to console her, touched by her very moving grief. And abruptly she began to tell me her history, as if she did not want to be left alone any longer to bear her grief.

"Oh! . . . Oh! . . . Monsieur. . . . If you knew . . . in what distress I live . . . in what distress. . . ."

"I was happy. . . . I have a home . . . away in my own country. I cannot go back again, I shall never go back again, it is too cruel."

"I have a son. . . . It is he! It is he! Children do not know. . . . One has so short a time to live! If I saw him now, I might not know him! How I loved him! How I loved him! Even before he was born, when I felt him stir in my body. And then afterwards! How I embraced him, caressed him, cherished him! If you only knew how many nights I

have spent watching him sleep, thinking of him ! I was mad about him. He was eight years old when his father sent him away to a boarding-school. It was all over. He was no longer mine. Oh ! my God ! He used to come every Sunday, that was all.

"Then he went to school in Paris. He only came four times a year ; and each time I marvelled at the changes in him, at finding him grown bigger without having seen him grow. I was robbed of his childhood, his trust, the love he would never have withdrawn from me, all my joy in feeling him grow and become a little man.

"I saw him four times a year ! Think of it ! At each of his visits his body, his eyes, his movements, his voice, his laugh, were no longer the same, were no longer mine. A child alters so swiftly, and, when you are not there to watch him alter, it is so sad ; you will never find him again !

"One year he arrived with down upon his cheeks ! He ! My son ! I was amazed . . . and—would you believe it ?—sad. I scarcely dared to kiss him. Was this my baby, my wee thing with fair curls, my baby of long ago, the darling child I had laid in long clothes upon my knee, who had drunk my milk with his little greedy lips, this tall brown boy who no longer knew how to caress me, who seemed to love me chiefly as a duty, who called me 'mother' for convention's sake, and who kissed me on the forehead when I longed to crush him in my arms ?

"My husband died. Then it was the turn of my parents. Then I lost my two sisters. When Death enters a house, it is as though he hastened to finish as much work as possible so that he need not return for a long time. He leaves but one or two alive to mourn the rest.

"I lived alone. In those days my big son was dutiful enough. I hoped to live and die near him.

"I went to join him, so that we might live together. He had acquired a young man's ways ; he made me realise that I

worried him. I went away ; I was wrong ; but I suffered so to feel that I, his mother, was intruding. I went back home.

"I hardly saw him again.

"He married. What joy ! At last we were to be united again for ever. I should have grandchildren ! He had married an English girl who took a dislike to me. Why ? Perhaps she felt that I loved him too much ?

"I was again forced to go away. I found myself alone. Yes, Monsieur.

"Then he went to England. He was going to live with them, his wife's parents. Do you understand ? They have him, they have my son for their own ! They have stolen him from me ! He writes to me every month. At first he used to come and see me. Now he comes no more.

"It is four years since I have seen him. His face was wrinkled and his hair was turning white. Was it possible ? This man, who would soon be an old man, my son ? My little pink baby of long ago ? Doubtless I shall not see him again.

"And I travel all the year. I go to the right and to the left, as you see, all by myself.

"I am like a lost dog. Good-bye, Monsieur. Do not stay near me, it hurts me to have told you all this."

And, as I walked down the hill again, I turned round, and saw the old woman standing on a cracked wall, gazing at the mountains, the long valley, and Lake Chambon in the distance.

The skirts of her dress and the queer little shawl on her thin shoulders fluttered in the wind like a flag.

MASTER BELHOMME'S BEAST

THE HAVRE STAGL-COACH WAS JUST LEAVING CRIQUETOT and all the passengers were waiting in the yard of the Commercial Hotel, kept by young Malandain, for their names to be called out.

The coach was yellow, on wheels that once were yellow too, but now turned almost grey with accumulated layers of mud. The front wheels were quite small: those at the back, large and rickety, bore the well of the coach, which was unshapely and distended like the paunch of an animal.

Three white hacks harnessed in tandem, whose huge heads and large round knees were the most noticeable things about them, had to pull this conveyance, which had something monstrous in its build and appearance. The horses seemed asleep already in front of this strange vehicle.

The driver, Césaire Horlaville, a corpulent little man but agile enough nevertheless, by virtue of continually mounting the wheels and climbing on to the roof of his coach, with a face reddened by the open air of the country-side, by rain and storm and many brandies, and eyes always blinking as if still under the lash of wind and hail, appeared at the door of the hotel, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. Large round hampers, full of scared poultry, stood in front of the solid countrywomen. Césaire Horlaville took these one by one and put them up on the roof of his vehicle; then, more carefully, he put up those which were filled with eggs: finally he tossed up from below a few little sacks of seed and small parcels wrapped in handkerchiefs, bits of cloth or paper. Then he opened the door at the back and, taking a list from his pocket, he called out from it:

"The reverend Father from Gorgeville."

The priest came forward, a tall powerful man, broad, stout, purple in the face, and kindly. He lifted up his cassock to free his foot for stepping up, just as women lift up their skirts, and climbed into the rickety old coach.

"The schoolmaster from Rollebosc-les-Grinets."

The schoolmaster hurried forward, a tall and hesitating fellow, with a frock-coat down to his knees; and disappeared in his turn through the open door.

"Master Poirot, two seats."

Poirot took his place, tall and stooping, bent with drudgery, grown thin through lack of food, bony, and with a skin all wrinkled from neglected ablutions. His wife followed him, small and wizened, looking very like a tired mare, and clutching in both hands a large green umbrella.

"Master Rabot, two seats."

Rabot, by nature irresolute, hesitated. He asked:

"Was it me you were calling?"

The driver, who had been nicknamed "Foxy," was going to make a joking reply, when Rabot took a header towards the door of the coach, thrust forward by a shove from his wife, a tall, burly wretch with a belly as big and round as a barrel, and hands as large as a washerwoman's beetle.

And Rabot slipped into the coach like a rat into his hole.

"Master Camille."

A huge peasant, more beefy than a bull, summoned all his energy and was, in his turn, swallowed up inside the yellow wall of the coach.

"Master Belhomme."

Belhomme, a tall skeleton of a man, drew near, his neck aching, his face dolorous, a handkerchief applied to his ear as if he was suffering from very severe toothache.

All of them wore blue smocks over antique and peculiar fashions of black or green cloth, garments, worn on special occasions, which they would uncover in the streets of Havre; and their heads were covered with caps made of

silk, as high as towers—the final elegance in that Norman country-side.

Césaire Horlaville shut the door of his coach, climbed on to his box, and cracked his whip.

The three horses seemed to wake up, and, shaking their necks, made audible a vague murmur of tiny bells.

Then the driver, bawling out "Gee up!" from the bottom of his lungs, lashed the animals with a sweep of the arm. They roused themselves, made an effort, and set off along the road at a slow and halting jog-trot. And behind them the vehicle, jolting its loose panes and all the old iron of its springs, made an astounding jangle of tin and glassware, whilst each row of passengers, tossed and rocked by the jolts, surged up and down with every fall or rise of their uneven progress.

At first silence reigned, out of respect for the parish priest, whose presence put a restraint on their loquacity. He made the first remark, being of a garrulous and friendly disposition.

"Well, Master Caniveau," he said, "are you getting on all right?"

The big countryman, whose similarity of build, appearance, and paunch formed a bond between the priest and himself, replied, smiling:

"Much as usual, Father, much as usual, and how's yourself?"

"Oh, as for me, I can always get along!"

"And you, Poiret?" asked the reverend gentleman.

"I'd be all right, except for the colzas which have had nothing at all of a crop this year, and in business it is by the crops of colza that we make up our losses, as a rule."

"Well, well, times are hard!"

"Lord, yes, they're hard!" declared Rabot's hefty wife, in a voice like a policeman.

As she came from a neighbouring village, the priest knew nothing of her but her name.

"Are you the Blondel girl?" he asked.

"Yes, that's me. I married Rabot."

Rabot, skinny, nervous, and complacent, saluted the priest with a smile; he saluted him by bowing his head deeply forward, as if to say: "Yes, this is really Rabot, whom the Blondel girl has married."

Abruptly, Master Belhomme, who kept his handkerchief over his ear, began to groan in a lamentable manner. He ground his teeth horribly, stamping his feet to express the most frightful suffering.

"Your toothache seems to be very bad?" demanded the priest.

The peasant stopped moaning for an instant to reply:

"Not a bit of it, Father. It's not my teeth, it's my ear, right down inside my ear."

"What's the matter with your ear then? An abscess?"

"I don't know whether it's an abscess, but I know it's a beast, a filthy beast, which got itself inside me when I was asleep on the hay in the loft."

"A beast! Are you sure?"

"Am I sure? As sure as heaven, Father, seeing it's gnawing away the inside of my ear. It'll eat out my head, for sure, it'll eat out my head. Oh, ger-ow, ger-ow, ger-ow! . . ." And he began stamping his feet again.

His audience was roused to the keenest interest. Each of them proffered different advice. Poirer would have it that it was a spider, the schoolmaster that it was a caterpillar. He had seen such a case before at Campemuret, in the Orme county, where he had lived for six years; though in this case the caterpillar had got into the head and come out through the nose. But the man had remained deaf in that ear, because the ear-drum was split.

"It must have been a worm," declared the priest.

Master Belhomme, his head tilted on one side, and leaning it against the carriage door, for he had been the last to get in, went on groaning:

"Oh, ger-ow, ow, ow, I'm scared to death it's an ant,

"How d'you know it's not a rabbit you've got in your ear? It might have taken that earhole of yours for its burrow, seeing the undergrowth you've got growing outside. You wait. I'll make it run for its life."

And Caniveau, shaping his hands into a speaking-trumpet, began to imitate the crying of hounds hot on the scent. He yelped, howled, whimpered, and bayed. Everybody in the coach began to laugh, even the schoolmaster who never laughed.

However, as Belhomme appeared irritated at being made fun of, the priest turned the conversation, and speaking to Rabot's lusty wife, said:

"I dare say you have a big family?"

"Yes, indeed, Father. And how hard it is to rear them!"

Rabot nodded his head, as if to say: "Oh, yes, it's hard to rear them."

"How many children have you?"

She stated magisterially, in a harsh deliberate voice:

"Sixteen children, Father. Fifteen of them by my good man."

And Rabot's smile broadened, as he knuckled his forehead. He managed fifteen children all by himself, he, Rabot. His wife said so. And there was no doubting her. He was proud of it, by George!

By whom was the sixteenth? She did not say. Probably it was the first. Perhaps every one knew about it, for no one was surprised. Even Caniveau remained unmoved.

But Belhomme began to groan.

"Oh, ow . . . ow . . . ow . . . it fair tears me to bits. Hell!"

The coach drew up outside the Café Polyte. The priest said:

"If we were to drop a little water in your ear, it might bring the thing out with it. Would you like to try it?"

"For sure. I'm willing."

Every one got down to assist at the operation.

The priest called for a basin, a napkin, and a glass of water;

and he ordered the schoolmaster to hold the patient's head well over to one side, and then, as soon as the liquid should have penetrated into the passage, to swing it rapidly over the other way.

But Caniveau, who had straightaway applied himself to Belhomme's ear to see whether he could not discover the beast with his naked eye, cried out :

"God bless my soul, what a ugly mess! You'll have to get that out, my boy. No rabbit could get out through that conglomeration of stuff. He'd suck fast with all four feet."

The priest examined the passage in his turn and realised that it was too narrow and too stuffed with wax to attempt the expulsion of the beast. It was the schoolmaster who cleared the path with a match and a bit of rag. Then, amid general anxiety, the priest poured down this scoured channel half a glass of water which ran over Belhomme's face and hair and down his neck. Then the schoolmaster turned the head sharply back over the basin, as if he were trying to unscrew it. A few drops fell out into the white vessel. All the travellers flung themselves upon it. No beast had emerged.

However, Belhomme announcing : "I can't feel anything," the priest, triumphant, cried :

"It is certainly drowned !"

Every one was pleased. They all got back into the coach.

But hardly had they got under way again when Belhomme burst out with the most terrible cries. The beast had wakened up and had become quite frantic. He even swore that it had now got into the head, that it was devouring his brain for him. He accompanied his howls with such contortions that Poirer's wife, believing him possessed of the devil, began to cry and make the sign of the cross. Then, the pain abating a little, the afflicted man related that it was now careering round his ear. He described with his finger the movements of the beast, seeming to see it, and follow it with a watchful eye.

"Look at it now, there it goes up again! . . . ow . . . ow . . . ow . . . oh, hell!"

Caniveau lost patience.

"It's the water has sent it crazy, that beast of yours. Likely it's more used to wine."

His listeners burst out laughing. He added:

"As soon as you and me reach the Café Bourbonx, give it a small brandy and I'll warrant it'll worry you no more."

But Belhomme could no longer endure his misery. He began to cry out as if his very inside was being torn out. The priest was obliged to support his head for him. His companions begged Césaire Horlaverse to stop at the first house on the way.

It turned out to be a farm, lying near the roadside. Belhomme was carried to it; then they stretched him out on the kitchen table to begin the operation again. Caniveau persisted in advising Memboux brandy with the water, in order to make the beast either tipsy or drowsy, or perhaps kill it outright. But the priest preferred vinegar.

This time they poured in the liquid drop by drop, so that it would reach the farthest corner; then they left it for some minutes in the inhabited organ.

Another basin having been brought, Belhomme was turned bodily over by that lusty pair, the priest and Caniveau, while the schoolmaster banged with his finger on the healthy ear, the better to empty out the other.

Césaire Horlaverse himself, whip in hand, had come in to watch.

All at once they saw in the bottom of the basin a small brown speck, no bigger than an onion seed. It was moving, however. It was a flea! Cries of surprise burst forth, then shouts of laughter. A flea! Oh, this was rich, this was very rich! Caniveau slapped his thigh, Césaire Horlaverse cracked his whip, the priest burst into guffaws like the braying of an ass, the schoolmaster gave vent to a laugh like a sneeze, and the two

women uttered little cries of merriment like nothing but the clucking of hens.

Belhomme was sitting on the table, and, resting the basin on his knees, he contemplated with grave intentness, and a gleam of angry joy in his eye, the vanquished beastie which turned and twisted in its drop of water.

He grunted: "So there you are, you swine," and spit at it.

The driver, beside himself with amusement, repeated:

"A flea, a flea! Oh, look at it, the little devil of a flea, the little devil of a flea!"

Then, his exuberance wearing off a little, he cried:

"Come now, let's be off. We've wasted enough time."

And the travellers, still laughing, made their way to the coach.

But Belhomme, last to come, declared:

"I'm off back to Criquetot. I've nowt to do at Havre."

The driver told him:

"Never mind that, pay your fare."

"I don't owe no more than half, seeing I've not done half the journey."

"You owe as much as if you'd done the lot."

And a dispute began, which very soon became a furious quarrel. Belhomme swore that he would pay no more than twenty sous, Césaire Horlaville declared that he would have forty.

They shouted at each other, thrusting their faces close together and glaring into each other's eyes.

Caniveau clambered out of the coach.

"In the first place you owe forty sous to the priest, d'ye hear, and then drinks round to every one, that makes it fifty-five, and out of that you'll have to give Césaire twenty. How's that, Foxy?"

The driver, delighted at the idea of Belhomme's having to screw out three francs seventy-five, replied:

"Right you are."

"Now then, pay up."

"I'll not pay. The priest's not a doctor, anyhow."

"If you don't pay, I'll put you back in the coach with Césaire and take you to Havre."

And seizing Bellhomme round the waist, the giant lifted him up as if he had been a child.

The other realised that he would have to give in. He drew out his purse and paid.

Then the coach set off again for Havre, while Bellhomme turned back towards Criquetot and all the travellers, silent now, watched his blue peasant's smock, rolling along on his long legs down the white road.

FOR SALE

TO SET OUT ON FOOT, WHEN THE SUN IS JUST RISING, AND WALK through the dew, by the side of the fields, at the verge of the quiet sea, what ecstasy !

What ecstasy ! It enters in through the eyes with the radiant light, through the nostrils with the sharp air, through the skin with the caressing wind.

Why do we retain, so clear, so precious, so sharp a memory of a few moments of passionate union with the Earth, the memory of a swift, divine emotion, of the almost caressing greeting of a country-side revealed by a twist of the road, at the mouth of a valley, at the edge of a river, just as if we had come upon a charming and complaisant young girl ?

I remember one day, among many. I was walking along the coast of Brittany towards the out-thrust headland of Finistère. I walked quickly, thinking of nothing at all, along the edge of the water. This was in the neighbourhood of Quimperlé, in the loveliest and most adorable part of Brittany.

It was a morning in spring, one of those mornings in which one is again just twenty, a morning to revive dead hopes and give back the dreams of first youth.

I walked between the cornfields and the sea, along a road that was no better than a path. The corn was quite motionless, and the waves lifted very gently. The air was filled with the fragrance of ripening fields and the salt scent of the seaweed. I walked without a thought in my head, straight forward, continuing a journey I had begun fifteen days before, a tramp round the coast of Brittany. I felt gloriously fit, content, light of feet and light of heart. I just walked.

I thought of nothing. Why think of anything in hours filled

by an instinctive happiness, a profound physical happiness, the happiness of the beasts of the fields and the birds soaring in the blue spaces beneath the sun? I heard the far-off sound of hymn-singing. A procession perhaps, since this was Sunday. Then I rounded a little headland, stood still, amazed with delight. Five large fishing-boats came into sight, filled with people, men, women, and children, on their way to the Indulgence at Plouneven.

They hugged the coast, moving slowly, helped scarcely at all by the soft, timid wind which swelled the brown sails faintly and then, as if wearied out, let them fall, all slack, round the masts.

The clumsy boats moved slowly, filled with such a crowd of folk. And the whole crowd was singing. The men standing against the sides of the boats, their heads covered with wide hats, sang their deep notes lustily, the women shrilled the treble air, and the thin voices of the children pierced that devout and monstrous uproar like the tuneless squeak of fifes.

The voyagers in all five boats shouted the same hymn, whose monotonous rhythm rose to the quiet sky, and the five boats sailed one behind the other, close together.

They passed close by in front of me, and I saw them draw away, I heard their song sink and die upon the air.

And I fell dreaming delightful dreams, as youth will dream, absurd divine dreams.

How swiftly it is gone, the age of dreams, the only happy age in a whole lifetime. No one is ever lonely, ever sad, ever gloomy or cast down, who bears within himself that most wonderful power of wandering, as soon as he is left to himself, into a world of happy dreams. What faery world, where anything may happen in the audacious imagination of the dreamer who roams therein! How adorable life appears covered in the gold dust of dreams!

Alas, those days are done!

I fell dreaming. Of what? Of all that a man never ceases to hope for, all that he desires, riches, honour, women.

And I walked on, taking great strides, my hand caressing the yellow locks of the corn, which bowed itself under my fingers and thrilled my skin as if I had touched living hair.

I made my way round a little promontory and saw, at the end of a narrow open beach, a white-walled house built above three terraces that came down to the shore.

Why does this house send through me a shiver of delight? Do I know it? Sometimes, in such wanderings, we come upon corners of the country that we seem to have known for a very long time, so familiar are they to us, so do they wake a response in our hearts. Is it possible that we have never seen them before, that we have not lived in them in some former life? Everything about them stirs us, fills us with the most profound delight, the gentle swell of the horizon, the ordered trees, the colour of the soil.

A charming house, rising from its high steps. Large fruit-trees had established themselves along the terraces which came down to the water, like giant stairs. And on the rim of each terrace, like a crown of gold, ran a border of Spanish broom in full flower.

I halted in my tracks, possessed with a sudden love for this dwelling-place. How I would have liked to own it, to live there, for ever!

I drew near the door, my heart beating quickly with envious desire, and saw, on one of the pillars of the gate, a big placard: "For Sale."

I felt a sharp thrill of delight, as if this dwelling had been offered to me, as if I had been given it. Why, yes, why? I do not know.

"For Sale." Then it no longer belonged to any special person, could belong to anyone on earth, to me, to me! Why this joy, this sense of utter delight, deep incomprehensible delight? I knew well enough, however, that I could not buy

it. How could I pay for it? No matter, it was for sale. The caged bird belongs to its owner, the bird in the air is mine, not being man's.

I went into the garden. Oh, what a delightful garden, with its terraces lifted one above the other, its espaliers with arms stretched out like crucified martyrs, its clumps of golden broom, and two old fig-trees at the end of each terrace!

When I stood on the last, I looked all round me. The shore of the little bay stretched at my feet, curved and sandy, separated from the open sea by three massive brown rocks, which closed the entry to the bay and must have acted as a breakwater on rough days.

On the headland, right opposite, two great stones, one upright, the other lying in the grass, a menhir and a dolmen, like two strange beings, husband and wife, turned to stone by an evil spell, seemed to watch unwinkingly the small house that they had seen built—they who for centuries had known this one-time solitary cove—the small house that they would see fall, crumple, vanish little by little and altogether disappear, the little house that was for sale.

Oh, old dolmen and old menhir, how I love you!

I knocked at the door as if I had been knocking at my own door. A woman came to open it, a servant, a little old servant, black-gowned, white-bonneted, looking like a working nun. It seemed to me as if I knew her too, this woman.

I said to her:

"You are not a Breton woman, are you?"

She answered:

"No, sir, I come from Lorraine."

She added:

"You have come to look over the house?"

"Oh, yes, certainly."

And I went in.

It seemed to me that I knew it all, the walls, the furniture.

I was almost surprised not to find my own walking-sticks in the hall.

I made my way into the drawing-room, a charming drawing-room carpeted with rush-mats, which looked out over the sea through its three large windows. On the mantel-shelf, Chinese vases and a large photograph of a woman. I went to it at once, convinced that I recognised her too. And I did recognise her, although I was certain that I had never met her. It was she, the inexpressible she, she for whom I was waiting, whom I desired, she whom I summoned, whose face haunted my dreams. She, she whom one seeks always, in every place, she whom one is every moment just going to see in the street, just going to discover on a country road the instant one's glance falls on a red sunshade over the cornfield, she who must surely already be in the hotel when I enter it on my travels, in the railway carriage I am just getting into, in the drawing-room whose door is just opening to me.

It was she, assuredly, past all manner of doubt, it was she. I recognised her by her eyes which were looking at me, by her hair arranged English fashion, but above all by her mouth, by that smile which long ago I had surmised.

I asked at once :

“ Who is this lady ? ”

The nun-like servant answered dryly :

“ That is Madame.”

I continued :

“ She is your mistress ? ”

In her austere conventional fashion, she replied :

“ Oh, no, sir.”

I sat down and said firmly :

“ Tell me about her.”

She stood amazed, motionless, obstinately silent.

I persisted :

“ She is the owner of the house, then ? ”

“ Oh, no, sir.”

"Then whose is this house?"

"It belongs to my master, Monsieur Tournelle."

I pointed a finger towards the photograph.

"And this lady, who is she?"

"That is Madame."

"Your master's wife?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"His mistress, then?"

The nun had nothing to say. I went on, pricked by a vague jealousy, by a confused anger against this man who found this woman first.

"Where are they now?"

The servant murmured:

"Monsieur, the gentleman is in Paris, but about Madame I know nothing."

I shivered.

"Ah. They are no longer together?"

"No, sir."

I became wily, and said solemnly:

"Tell me what happened, probably I could be of service to your master. I know this woman, she's a bad lot."

The old servant looked at me, and seeing my honest expression, she trusted me.

"Oh, sir, she did my master a bad turn. He made her acquaintance in Italy and he brought her away with him as if he had married her. She sang beautifully. He loved her so much, sir, that it was pitiful to see him. They were travelling in this district last year. And they discovered this house which had been built by a fool, an old fool who wanted to settle five miles from the village. Madame wanted to buy it outright, so that she could stay here with my master. And he bought the house to please her.

"They lived here all last summer, sir, and almost all the winter.

"And then, one morning at breakfast-time, Monsieur called me.

“ ‘ Césaire, has Madame come in ? ’ ”

“ ‘ No, sir. ’ ”

“ We waited for her the whole day. My master was like a madman. We sought everywhere ; we did not find her. She had gone, sir, we never knew where or how. ”

Oh, what a tide of joy surged in me ! I would have liked to embrace the nun, to seize her round the waist and make her dance in the drawing-room.

Oh, she had gone, she had escaped, she had left him, utterly wearied, disgusted with him ! How happy I was !

The old woman went on :

“ Monsieur almost died of grief, and he has gone back to Paris, leaving me here with my husband to sell the house. He is asking twenty thousand francs for it. ”

But I was no longer listening. I was thinking of her. And all at once it struck me that I had only to set out again to come upon her, that this very springtime she would have been driven to come back to the place, to see the house, this charming house that she must have loved so dearly, to see it emptied of him.

I flung ten francs into the old woman's hand. I snatched the photograph and rushed off at a run, pressing desperate kisses on the adorable face that looked up from the cardboard.

I regained the road and began to walk on, looking at her, her very self. How glorious that she was free, that she had got away ! Without doubt I should meet her to-day or to-morrow, this week or next, now that she had left him. She had left him because my hour had come.

She was free, somewhere, in the world. I had only to find her now that I knew her.

And all the while I touched caressingly the bowed locks of ripe corn, I drank in the sea air that filled out my lungs, I felt the sun kissing my face. I had walked on, I walked on wild with joy, drunk with hope. I walked on, certain that I was going to meet her soon and lead her back to enjoy our turn in that charming home “ For Sale. ” How she would revel in it, this time !

THE UNKNOWN

WE WERE TALKING OF LUCKY ADVENTURES AND EACH OF US had an odd happening to relate, delightful and unexpected encounters, in a railway carriage, in a hotel, abroad, on a sea-shore. Seashores, said Roger des Annettes, were uncommonly propitious for a love-affair.

Gontran, who had said nothing, was appealed to.

"Paris is still the happiest hunting-ground of all," said he. "With a woman, as with a book, we appreciate one more highly in a place where we never expected to find one; but the finest specimens are found only in Paris."

He was silent for some moments, then added:

"God, how adorable they are! Go out into our streets on any spring morning. They look as if they had come up like flowers, the little darlings pattering along beside the houses. What a charming, charming, charming sight! The scent of violets reaches us from the pavement; the bunches of violets that pass us in the slow-moving carts pushed by the hawkers. The town is alive with spring, and we look at the women. Christ, how tempting they are in their light frocks, thin frocks through which their skin gleams! One strolls along, nose down to the scent and senses on fire; one strolls along and one sniffs them out and waylays them. Such mornings are utterly divine.

"You notice her approaching in the distance, a hundred paces away you can find out and recognise the woman who will be delightful at close range. By a flower in her hat, a movement of her head, the swing of her body, you know her. She comes. You say to yourself: 'Attention, eyes front!' and walk past her with your eyes devouring her.

"Is she a slip of a girl running errands for a shop, a young woman coming from church or going to visit her lover? What's the odds? Her breast shows rounded under her transparent bodice. Oh, if only one might thrust a finger down beneath it—a finger, or one's lips! Does she look sly or bold, is her head dark or fair? What's the odds? The swift passage of this woman, as she flits past, sends a thrill down your spine. And how desire haunts us until evening for the woman we have met in such a fashion! I'll swear I've treasured the memory of a round twenty of the dear creatures seen once or ten times like this, and I would have fallen madly in love with them if I had known them more intimately.

"But there you are, the women we cherish most fiercely are the ones we never know. Have you noticed it? It's very odd. Every now and then one catches a glimpse of women the mere sight of whom rouses in us the wildest desire. But one never more than glimpses them. For my part, when I think of all the adorable creatures whom I have jostled in the streets of Paris, I could hang myself for rage. Where are they? Who are they? Where could I find them again, see them again? There is a proverb which says that we are always rubbing elbows with happiness, and I'll take my oath that I've more than once walked past the woman who could have snared me like a linnet with the allurements of her fragrant body."

Roger des Annettes had been listening with a smile, and answered:

"I know all that as well as you. Listen what happened to me, yes, to me. About five years ago I met for the first time, on the Pont de la Concorde, a tall and rather sturdy young woman who made on me an impression . . . oh, an altogether amazing impression! She was a brunette, a plump brunette, with gleaming hair growing low on her forehead and eyebrows that bracketed both eyes under their high arch that stretched from temple to temple. The shadow of a moustache on her lip set one dreaming . . . dreaming . . . as the sight of a bunch of

flowers on a table stirs dreams of a beloved wood. She had a shapely figure, firm rounded breasts held proudly like a challenge, offering themselves as a temptation. Her eyes were like ink-stains on the gleaming white of her skin. This girl's eyes were not eyes, but shadowed caverns, deep open caverns in her head, through which one saw right into her, entered into her. What a veiled empty gaze, untroubled by thought and utterly lovely!

"I imagined her to be a Jewess. I followed her. More than one man turned to look after her. She walked with a slightly swaggering gait, a little graceless but very disturbing. She took a cab in the Place de la Concorde. And I stood there like a stuck pig, beside the Obelisk; I stood transfixed by the fiercest passion of longing that had ever assailed me in my life.

"I remembered her for at least three weeks, then I forgot her.

"Six months later I saw her again in the Rue de la Paix, and at sight of her my heart leaped as if I had caught sight of some mistress whom I had loved to distraction. I halted the better to watch her approach. As she passed me, almost touching me, I seemed to be standing in the mouth of a furnace. Then, as she drew away, I felt as if a cool wind were blowing across my face. I did not follow her. I was afraid of committing some folly, afraid of myself.

"Again and again I saw her in my dreams. You know what such obsessions are.

"It was a year before I found her again; then, one evening at sunset, about the month of May, I recognised her in a woman who was walking in front of me up the Champs-Élysées.

"The Arc de l'Étoile lifted its sombre outline against the flaming curtain of the sky. A golden dust, a mist of rosy light hung in the air, it was one of those splendid evenings which are the immortal glory of Paris.

"I followed her, wild with the longing to speak to her, to kneel at her feet, to tell her of the emotion which was choking me.

"Twice I walked past her in order to turn and meet her

again. Twice, as I passed her, I experienced again that sensation of fiery heat which had come over me in the Rue de la Paix.

"She looked at me. Then I saw her enter a house in the Rue de Presbourg. I waited two hours in a doorway. She did not come out. At last I decided to question the concierge. He did not appear to understand me. 'She must have been a caller,' he said.

"And it was eight months before I saw her again.

"Then one January morning, during a spell of Arctic cold, I was on my way down the Boulevard Malesherbes and running to warm myself, when at the corner of a street I collided so violently with a woman that she dropped a small parcel.

"I began apologies. It was she!

"For a moment I stood still, stunned by the suddenness of the shock; then, giving her back the parcel she had been carrying in her hand, I said abruptly:

"'I am distressed and overjoyed, Madame, to have rushed into you like this. Will you believe me that for more than two years I have noticed you, admired you, longed cruelly to make your acquaintance, and I could not manage to find out who you were nor where you lived? Pardon words like these, ascribe them to my passionate desire to be numbered among those who have the right to speak to you. Such a feeling could not wrong you, could it? You do not know me. I am Baron Roger des Annettes. Make your own inquiries: you will be told that I am a man you can admit to your house. If you refuse my request now, you will make me the most miserable wretch alive. I implore you, be kind, give me, allow me the chance to visit you.'

"She regarded me intently, out of her strange lustreless eyes, and answered smiling:

"'Give me your address. I will come to your house.'

"I was so utterly dumbfounded that I must have shown it. But I am never long in recovering from such shocks and I hastened to give her a card, which she slipped into her pocket

with a swift gesture, with a hand evidently used to manipulating clandestine letters.

"Becoming bold, I stammered :

" ' When shall I see you ? ' "

"She hesitated, as if she had to make a complicated calculation, no doubt trying to recollect just what she had to do with each hour of her time ; then she murmured :

" ' Sunday morning, is that all right for you ? ' "

" ' I am quite sure that it is all right. ' "

"Then she went away, after she had searched my face, judged me, summed me up, dissected me with that heavy insensible stare that seemed to leave something on one's skin, a kind of viscous fluid, as if her glance flung out on to human beings one of those dense liquids which devil-fish use to cloud the water and lull their prey to sleep.

"All the time until Sunday, I gave myself up to the most desperate cudgelling of my wits, in the effort to make up my mind what she was and ascertain the correct attitude to adopt to her.

"Ought I to give her money ? How much ?

"I decided to buy a piece of jewellery, an uncommonly charming piece of jewellery too, and I placed it, in its case, on the mantel-shelf.

"I waited for her, after a restless night.

"She arrived about ten o'clock, quite calm, quite placid, and gave me her hand as if we were old friends. I offered her a seat, I relieved her of her hat, her veil, her furs, her muff. Then, slightly embarrassed, I began to press her somewhat more hardily, for I had no time to lose.

"She asked for nothing better, and we had not exchanged twenty words before I began to undress her. She herself continued this ticklish business that I never succeed in finishing : I prick myself on pins, I twist strings into inextricable knots instead of undoing them ; I mismanage and confuse everything, I delay it all and I lose my head.

"Do you know any moment in life, my friend, more marvellous than the moments when you are watching—standing just far enough away and using just enough discretion to avoid startling that ostrieh modesty all women affect—a woman who is stripping herself for you of all the rustling garments that fall round her feet, one after another ?

"And what is prettier, too, than the gestures with which they put off those adorable garments that slip to the ground, empty and stretched indolently out as if they had just been struck dead ? How glorious and intoxicating is the revelation of her flesh, her naked arms and breasts after her bodice is off, and how disturbing the lines of her body glimpsed under the last veil of all !

"But all at once I saw an amazing thing, a black stain between her shoulders ; for she had turned her back to me : a wide stain standing vividly out, black as night. I had promised, moreover, not to look at her.

"What was it ? I had not the least doubt what it was, however, and the memory of that clearly visible moustache, the eyebrows joined above the eyes, of that mop of hair which covered her head like a helmet, ought to have prepared me for this shock.

"I was none the less dumbfounded and my mind was thronged suddenly with swift thoughts and strange remembered things. I imagined that I was looking at one of those enchantresses from the Thousand and One Nights, one of those fatal and faithless creatures who exist only to drag mortal men into unknown abysses. I thought of Solomon making the Queen of Sheba walk over a mirror to assure himself that she had not a cloven hoof.

"And . . . and when it came to the point of singing her my song of love, I discovered that I had no voice left, not even a trickle of sound, my dear. Or let's say I had a voice like a eunuch, which at first astonished and at last thoroughly displeased her, for she remarked, clothing herself with all dispatch :

“ ‘ There was not much point in putting me to this trouble, was there ? ’

“ I wanted her to accept the ring bought for her, but she said deliberately and very stiffly : ‘ What do you take me for, Monsieur ? ’ so that I crimsoned to the ears under this accumulation of humiliations. And she departed without adding another word.

“ And that is all there is to my adventure. But the worst of it is that, now, I am in love with her, and madly in love.

“ I cannot see a woman without thinking of her. All others repel me, disgust me, in so far as they do not resemble her. I cannot press a kiss on another cheek without seeing her cheek beside the one I am caressing, and without suffering agonies from the unappeased desire which torments me.

“ She is present at all my rendezvous, at all the caresses, that she spoils for me and renders hateful to me. She is always there, pressed close to the other woman, standing or lying down, visible and unattainable. And I believe now that she was in very truth a woman under a spell, bearing between her shoulders a mysterious talisman.

“ Who is she ? Even now I do not know. I have met her twice again. I bowed to her. She made not the slightest return to my greeting, she pretended not to know me at all. Who is she ? An Asiatic perhaps ? Most likely an Eastern Jewess. Yes, a Jewess. I am convinced she is a Jewess. But why ? Yes, why indeed ? I do not know.”

THE SECRET

THE LITTLE BARONESS DE GRANGERIE WAS DROWSING ON HER couch, when the little Marquise of Rennedon entered abruptly, looking very disturbed, her bodice a little rumped, her hat a little on one side, and dropped into a chair, exclaiming :

“ Ouf, I’ve done it ! ”

Her friend, who had never seen her anything but placid and gentle, sat bolt upright in amazement. She demanded :

“ What is it ? What have you done ? ”

The Marchioness, who did not seem able to remain in one place, got to her feet, and began to walk about the room ; then she flung herself on the foot of the couch where her friend was resting and, taking her hands, said :

“ Listen, darling, promise me never to repeat what I am going to tell you.”

“ I promise.”

“ On your immortal soul.”

“ On my immortal soul.”

“ Well, I have just revenged myself on Simon.”

The other woman exclaimed :

“ Oh, you’ve done right ! ”

“ Yes, haven’t I ? Just think, during the past six months he has become more intolerable than ever, intolerable beyond words. When I married him, I knew well enough how ugly he was, but I thought he was a kindly man. What a mistake I made ! He must certainly have thought that I loved him for himself, with his fat paunch and his red nose, for he began to coo like a turtle-dove. You can imagine that it made me laugh, I nicknamed him ‘ Pigeon ’ for it. Men really do have the oddest notions about themselves. When he realised that I felt

no more than friendship for him, he became suspicious, he began to speak bitterly to me, to treat me as if I were a coquette or a fast woman, or I don't know what. And then it became more serious because of . . . of . . . it's not very easy to put it into words. . . . In short, he was very much in love with me, very much in love . . . and he proved it to me often, far too often. Oh, my dearest, what torture it is to be . . . made love to by a clown of a man! . . . No, really, I couldn't bear it any longer . . . not any longer at all . . . it is just like having a tooth pulled every evening . . . much worse than that, much worse. Well, imagine among your acquaintances someone very ugly, very ridiculous, very repellent, with a fat paunch—that's the frightful part—and great hairy calves. You can just imagine him, can't you? Now imagine that this someone is your husband . . . and that . . . every evening . . . you understand. No, it's loathsome! . . . loathsome! It made me sick, positively sick . . . sick in my basin. Really, I can't bear it any longer. There ought to be a law to protect wives in such cases. Just imagine it yourself, every evening! . . . Pah, it's beastly!

"It's not that I have been dreaming of romantic love-affairs—never. There aren't any nowadays. All the men in our world are like stable-boys or bankers; they care for nothing but horses or money; and if they love women, they love them only to show off, just to display them in their drawing-room as they show off a pair of chestnuts in the Bois. Nothing else. Up to day, such that romantic feelings can play no part.

"We should show ourselves merely as matter-of-fact and unemotional women. Love, of course is now no more than meetings at stated times, at which the same thing is always repeated. Besides, for whom could one feel any affection or tenderness? Men, our men, are generally speaking only correct tailors' dummies, altogether wanting in intelligence and sensibility. If we look for any intellectual graces, as a man looks for water in

a desert, we call the artists to our side ; and we behold the arrival of intolerable *poseurs* or underbred Bohemians. As for me, like Diogenes, I have been looking for a man, one real man in the whole of Parisian society ; but I am already quite convinced that I shall not find him, and it will not be long before I blow out my lantern. To return to my husband, since it fairly turned my stomach to see him coming into my room in his shirt and drawers, I used all means, all, you understand me, to alienate him and to . . . disgust him with me. At first he was furious, and then he became jealous, he imagined that I was deceiving him. In the early days he contented himself with watching me. He glared like a tiger at all the men who came to the house, and then the persecution began. He followed me everywhere. He used abominable means to take me off my guard. Then he never left me alone to talk with anyone. At all the balls, he remained planted behind me, poking out his clumsy hound's head as soon as I said a word. He followed me to the buffet, forbidding me to dance with this man and that man, taking me away in the very middle of the cotillon, making me look foolish and ridiculous, and appear I don't know what sort of a person. It was after this that I ceased to go anywhere.

"In this intimacy, he became worse still. Would you believe that the wretch treated me as . . . as . . . I daren't say it . . . as a harlot.

"My dear ! . . . he said to me one evening : ' Whose bed have you been sharing to-day ? ' I wept and he was delighted.

"And then he became worse still. The other week he took me to dine in the Champs-Élysées. Fate ordained that Baubiguac should be at the neighbouring table. Then, if you please, Simon began to tread furiously on my feet and growl at me over the melon : ' You have given him a rendezvous, you slut ! Just you wait ! ' Then—you could never guess what he did, my dear—he had the audacity to pull my hatpin gently out and he drove it into my arm. I uttered a loud cry.

Everybody came running up. Then he staged a detestable comedy of mortification. You can imagine it.

"At that very moment I said to myself: 'I'll have my revenge, and before very long, too.' What would you have done?"

"Oh, I would have revenged myself!"

"Very well, that's what I've done to him."

"How?"

"What! Don't you understand?"

"But, my dear . . . still . . . well, yes."

"Yes, what? Gracious, just think of his head! Can't you just see him, with his fat face, his red nose, and his sidewhiskers hanging down like dog's ears."

"Yes."

"Well, I said to myself: 'I shall revenge myself for my own pleasure and Marie's,' for I always intended to tell you, but never anyone but you, mind. Just think of his face and then remember that he . . . that he . . . he is. . . ."

"What . . . you've. . . ."

"Oh, darling, never, never tell a soul, promise me again! But think how funny it is . . . think. . . . He has looked quite different to me since that very moment . . . and I burst out laughing all alone . . . all alone. . . . Just think of his head."

The Baroness looked at her friend, and the wild laughter that welled up in her breast burst between her lips; she began to laugh, but she laughed as if she were hysterical, and with both hands pressed to her breast, her face puckered up, her breath strangled in her throat, she leaned forward as if she would fall over on her face.

Then the little Marquise herself gave way to a stifling outburst of mirth. Between two cascades of little cries she repeated:

"Think . . . do think . . . isn't it funny? Tell me . . . think of his head . . . think of his sidewhiskers! . . . of his nose . . . just think . . . isn't it funny? but whatever you do, don't tell anyone . . . don't . . . tell . . . about it . . . ever!"

They continued for some minutes very nearly suffocated, unable to speak, weeping real tears in their ecstasy of amusement.

The Baroness was the first to recover her self-control, and still shaking :

" Oh ! . . . tell me how you did it . . . tell me . . . it's so funny . . . so funny ! "

But the other woman could not speak . . . she stammered :

" When I had made up my mind . . . I said to myself : . . . ' Now . . . hurry up . . . you must make it happen at once.' . . . And I . . . did it . . . to-day. . . . "

" To-day ! "

" Yes . . . right at once . . . and I told Simon to come and look for me at your house for our especial amusement. . . . He's coming . . . at once . . . he's coming. . . . Just think . . . think . . . think of his head when you see him. . . . "

The Baroness, a little sobered, panted as if she had just finished running a race. She answered :

" Oh, tell me how you did it . . . tell me. "

" It was quite easy. I said to myself : ' He is jealous of Baubiguac ; very well, Baubiguac it shall be. He is as clumsy as his feet, but quite honourable ; incapable of gossiping.' Then I went to his house after breakfast. "

" You went to his house. On what excuse ? "

" A collection . . . for orphans. . . . "

" Tell me the whole tale . . . quickly . . . tell me the whole tale. . . . "

" He was so astounded to see me that he could not speak. And then he gave me two louis for my collection, and then as I got up to go away, he asked news of my husband ; then I pretended to be unable to contain my feelings any longer, and I told him everything that was on my mind. I painted him even blacker than he is, look you. . . . Then Baubiguac was very touched, he began to think of ways in which he might help me . . . and as for me, I began to cry . . . but I cried as a woman cries . . . when she is crying on purpose. . . . "

He comforted me . . . he made me sit down . . . and then, didn't stop, he put his arm round me. . . . I said : ' Oh, poor friend . . . my poor friend ! ' He repeated : ' My poor friend, my poor friend ! ' and he went on embracing me . . . all the time . . . until we reached the closest embrace of all. . . . There.

" When it was over, I made a terrible display of despair and reproaches. Oh, I treated him, I treated him as if he were the lowest of the low But I wanted to burst out laughing madly. I thought of Simon, of his head, of his sidewhiskers. Imagine it . . . just imagine it ! I've done it to him. And he was so afraid of it happening. Come wars, earthquakes, epidemics, even if we all die . . . I've done it to him. Nothing can ever prevent it now ! Think of his head . . . and say to yourself that I've done it to him ! "

" The Baroness, who was almost choking to death, demanded :

" Shall you see Baubiguac again ? "

" No, never. Certainly not. . . . I've had enough of him . . . he's no more desirable than my husband. "

And they both began to laugh again so violently that they reeled like epileptics.

The ringing of a bell silenced their mirth.

The Baroness murmured :

" It's he . . . look closely at him. "

The door opened, and a stout man appeared, a ruddy-faced man with thick lips and drooping sidewhiskers ; he rolled incensed eyes.

The two young women regarded him for a moment ; then they fell wildly down on the couch, in such a way that they groaned as if they were in the

stupefied voice :

" . . . are you mad ? . . . are you mad ? . . . are you mad ? "

THE CHRISTENING

“NOW, DOCTOR, A LITTLE COGNAC.”

“With pleasure.”

And the old naval doctor, holding out his little glass, watched the precious liquor rising to the brim, flecked with golden gleams.

Then he lifted it to the level of his eye, passed it in front of the light from the lamp, sniffed it, sucked in a few drops that he rolled a long time on his tongue and on the moist, sensitive flesh of his palate, then said :

“Oh, the divine poison ! Or rather, the seductive assassin, the adorable destroying angel !

“You know nothing about it, you people. You have read, it is true, that excellent book called *L'Assommoir*, but you have not seen, as I have, drink exterminate a whole tribe of savages, a small Negro kingdom, drink carried in kegs landed, with the most peaceful air, by red-bearded English sailors.

“But now listen. I have seen, with my own eyes, the strangest and most amazing drama of strong drink, and quite near here, in Brittany, in a little village in the neighbourhood of Pont l'Abbé.

“I was living at the time, on a year's leave, in a country-house left me by my father. You know that flat coast where the wind whistles day and night over the gorse bushes, and where one still sees here and there, upright and lying along the ground, those monstrous stones which were once gods, and which have retained something disturbing in their attitude, in their aspect, their shape. They always look to me as if they were just going to come alive, and I should see them set out across the country-side, with slow, heavy steps, the steps of

granite giants, or fly off on vast wings, stone wings, towards a Druid heaven.

"The sea encloses and dominates the horizon, the restless sea, full of black-headed rocks, always covered with a slaver of foam, like dogs who lie in wait for the fishermen.

"And they, these men, they go down to this terrible sea which overturns their fishing-cobbles with one shake of his blue-green back, and swallows them down like pellets. They go out in their small boats, day and night, brave, anxious, and drunk. Drunk they most often are. 'When the bottle is full,' they say, 'you see the reef; but when it's empty, you see it no more.'

"Go into the thatched cottages. You'll never find the father there. And if you ask the wife what has become of her man, she stretches her arm towards the sombre sea, muttering and frothing out its white saliva along the shore. He slept below it one evening when he had drunk a little too deeply. And the eldest son as well. She has four boys left, four tall striplings, fair-skinned and sturdy. Their turn next.

"I was living, then, in a country-house near Pont l'Abbé. I lived alone with my servant, an old sailor, and a Breton family who took care of the property in my absence. It consisted of three people, two sisters and the man who had married one of them, and who looked after my garden.

"This same year, about Christmas-time, my gardener's wife was brought to bed of a boy.

"The husband came to ask me to stand godfather. I could hardly refuse, and he borrowed ten francs, for christening-expenses, he said.

"The ceremony was arranged for the second of January. For a week past the ground had been covered with snow, a vast carpet, colourless and sombre, which seemed, in this low flat country, to stretch out over illimitable wastes. The sea, far beyond the white plain, looked black; and we could see it

moving restlessly, shaking its back, rolling its waves, as if it wanted to fling itself on its pale neighbour, who seemed dead, so quiet, so sad, so cold she lay.

"At nine o'clock in the morning, Papa Kérandee arrived in front of my door with his sister-in-law, the big Kesmagan, and the nurse who was carrying the child rolled up in a quilt.

"And then we all set out for the church. It was cold enough to split the dolmens, one of those piercing cold days which crack the skin and cause frightful pain with their bitter cold that burns like fire.

"As for me, I was thinking of the poor little creature who was being carried in front of us, and I thought to myself that this Breton race really was made of iron, since children were able, from the moment they were born, to survive such excursions.

"We arrived in front of the church, but the door was still shut. The priest was late.

"Thereupon the nurse, resting herself on one of the boundary stones near the porch, began to undress the infant. I thought at first that he had wetted his napkin, but I saw that they were stripping him naked, the poor little wretch, stark-naked, in the icy air. I ran forward, horrified at the insensate act.

"'Are you mad! You'll kill him.'

"The woman answered placidly :

"'Oh, no, honoured sir, he must come before the good God quite naked.'

"The father and the aunt looked on at the performance with the utmost calm. It was the custom. If it were not followed, ill luck would befall the infant.

"I worked myself up into a rage, I cursed the man, I threatened to go home, I tried forcibly to cover up the frail little body. It was all no use. The nurse escaped from me, running through the snow, and the poor little devil's body turned purple.

"I was just going to leave the cruel wretches when I saw the

priest coming across the fields, followed by the sacristan and a country lad.

"I ran to meet him, and expressed my indignation to him, without mincing my words. He was not surprised, he did not quicken his pace, he made no attempt to hurry himself. He answered :

" 'What do you expect, sir ? It's the custom. They all do it, we can't hinder them.'

" 'But at least get a move on !' I shouted.

"He replied :

" 'I can't come any quicker.'

"And he entered the vestry, while we remained on the threshold of the church, where I swear I suffered more than the little creature howling under the lash of the bitter cold.

"The door opened at last. We went in. But the child had to remain naked throughout the whole ceremony.

"It was interminable. The priest blundered on through the Latin syllables that issued from his mouth, falsely scanned. He walked with a slow gait, with the slow gait of a pious tortoise, and his white surplice froze my heart, like another fall of snow in which he had wrapped himself to torture, in the name of a cruel and barbarous God, this human grub racked by the cold.

"The christening was at last accomplished according to the proper rites, and I saw the nurse roll the frozen child, who was moaning in a thin pitiful voice, up again in its wide quilt.

"The priest said to me :

" 'Will you come and sign the register ?'

"I turned to my gardener :

" 'Now get back as quickly as you can, and get that child warm at once.'

"And I gave him some advice how to ward off inflammation of the lungs if there were still time to do it.

"The man promised to carry out my recommendation, and he went away with his sister-in-law and the nurse. I followed the priest into the vestry.

"When I had signed, he demanded five francs of me for expenses.

"Having given the father ten francs, I refused to pay again. The priest threatened to tear out the leaf and annul the ceremony. I threatened him, on my side, with the Public Prosecutor.

"The quarrel lasted a long time. I ended by paying.

"The instant I got home, I wanted to make sure that no further misfortune had happened. I ran to Kerandec's house, but the father, the sister-in-law, and the nurse had not yet returned.

"The woman who had given birth to the child, left all alone, was sobbing with cold in her bed, and she was hungry, having had nothing to eat since the night before.

" 'Where the devil have they gone?' I said.

"She answered, without surprise or resentment :

" 'They've gone off to celebrate the occasion.'

"It was the custom. Then I remembered my ten francs, which ought to have paid for the christening but were doubtless now paying for drink.

"I sent in some soup for the mother and I ordered a good fire to be made in her fire-place. I was anxious and angry, promising myself to let those devils have it hot and strong, and asking myself with horror what would become of the wretched brat.

"At six o'clock in the evening they had not returned.

"I ordered my servant to wait for them and I went to bed.

"I fell asleep very quickly, for I sleep like an old sea-dog.

"I was roused about daybreak, by my servant, who brought me some warm water for shaving.

"As soon as I had my eyes open, I demanded :

" 'And Kerandec?'

"The man hesitated, then he stammered :

" 'Oh, he came back, sir, after midnight, so drunk he could not walk, and the big Kesmagan woman too, and the nurse too.'

I verily believe they had slept in a ditch, so that the little baby was dead, which they hadn't even noticed.'

"I leaped out of bed, shouting:

" 'The child is dead!'

" 'Yes, sir. They carried it to Mother Kerandec. When she saw it, she began to cry; then they made her drink to comfort her.'

" 'What, they made her drink?'

" 'Yes, sir. But I only learned that this morning, just now. As Kerandec had neither brandy nor money, he took the lamp oil that you had given them, sir, and all four of them drank it, as much as was left in the bottle. And now the Kerandec woman is very ill.'

"I had flung on my clothes with all haste, and, snatching up a stick, with the determination to thrash all these human beasts, I ran to my gardener's house.

"The woman in the bed was rolling in agony, stupefied with paraffin, beside the blue corpse of the child.

"Kerandec, the nurse, and the big Kesmagan woman were snoring on the ground.

"I had to look to the wife, who died towards noon."

The old doctor was silent. He took up the bottle of brandy, poured out a fresh glass and, once more flashing the lamplight across the tawny liquor so that it seemed to fill his glass with the translucent essence of dissolved topazes, he swallowed the treacherous and gleaming liquid at a gulp.

INDISCRETION

BEFORE MARRIAGE, THEY HAD LOVED EACH OTHER WITH A pure love, their heads in the stars. It had begun in a pleasant acquaintance made on a sea front. He had found her entirely charming, this young girl, like a rose, with her transparent sunshades and her pretty gowns, drifting past the vast background of the sea. He had loved her, fair and delicately slender, in her frame of blue waves and illimitable sky. And he confounded the compassionate tenderness roused in him by this virginal child with the vague, powerful emotion stirred in his soul, his heart, his very veins, by the sharp salt air and the wide country-side filled with sun and sea.

As for the girl, she had loved him because he wooed her, because he was young, rich enough, well-bred and fastidious. She had loved him because it is natural for young girls to love young men who speak to them of love.

Then for three months they had spent their time together, eyes looking into eyes and hand touching hand. The mutual happiness that they felt—in the morning before the bath, in the freshness of a new day, and their farewells at night, on the shore, under the stars, in the soft warm of the quiet night, farewells murmured softly, very softly—had already the character of kisses, though their lips had never met.

They dreamed of one another in the instant of sleep, thought of one another in the instant of waking, and, without a word exchanged, called to each other, and desired each other with all the force of their souls and all the force of their bodies.

After their marriage, their adoration had come to earth. It had been at first a kind of sensuous and insatiable fury of possession, then an exalted affection wrought of flesh and blood

romance, of caresses already a little sophisticated, of ingenious and delicately indelicate love-making. Their every glance had a lascivious significance, all their gestures roused in them thoughts of the ardent intimacy of their nights.

Now, without acknowledging it, perhaps without yet realising it, they had begun to weary of one another. They loved each other dearly, still ; but there were no longer any revelations to share, nothing to do that they had not done many times, nothing to discover about one another, not even a new word of love, an unpremeditated ecstasy, an intonation that might make more poignant the familiar words, so often repeated.

None the less they made every effort to feed the dying flame of their first fierce caresses. Every day they invented affectionate pretences, artless or subtle little comedies, a whole series of desperate attempts to re-awake the insatiable ardour of first love in their hearts, and the burning desire of the bridal month in their blood.

Sometimes, by dint of exciting their passions, they enjoyed again an hour of unreal ecstasy, followed at once by a mood of fatigue and aversion.

They had tried moonlit nights, walks under the trees in the gentle air of evening, the poetry of riversides veiled in mist, the excitement of public festivities.

Then, one morning, Henrietta said to Paul :

" Will you take me to dine in a cabaret ? "

" Of course, darling."

" In a really well-known cabaret ? "

" Of course."

He looked at her, with a questioning air, quite aware that she was thinking of something that she did not care to say aloud.

She added :

" You know, in a cabaret . . . how shall I put it ? . . . in a really gay cabaret . . . in the sort of cabaret where people arrange to meet each other alone ? "

He smiled.

"Yes, I understand. In a private room of a fashionable café."

"That's it. But a fashionable café where you are known, where you have perhaps already had supper . . . no . . . dinner . . . and don't you know . . . you know . . . I should like . . . no, I'll never dare say it."

"Tell me, darling; what can anything matter, between you and me? We don't hide little things from each other."

"No, I dare not."

"Really now, don't pretend to be shy. What is it?"

"Well . . . well . . . I would like . . . I would like to be taken for your mistress . . . and that the waiters, who don't know that you are married, should suppose me your mistress, and you too . . . that you should think me your mistress, for one hour, just in that room which must have memories for you . . . Don't you see? And I shall believe, myself, that I am your mistress . . . I shall be doing a dreadful thing . . . I shall be deceiving you . . . with yourself. Don't you see? It is very wicked. . . . But I should like . . . don't make me blush . . . I feel myself blushing. . . . You can't imagine how it would . . . would excite me to dine like that with you, in a place that's not quite nice . . . in a *cabinet particulier* where people make love . . . every evening. . . . It is very wicked . . . I'm as red as a peony. Don't look at me."

He laughed, very amused, and answered:

"Yes, we'll go, this evening, to a really smart place, where I am known."

About seven o'clock they walked up the staircase of a fashionable boulevard café, he all smiles like a conqueror, she shy, veiled, delighted. As soon as they had entered a private room furnished with four arm-chairs and a vast couch of red velvet, the head waiter, black-clad, came in and presented the card. Paul offered it to his wife.

"What would you like to eat?"

"Oh, but I don't know what's the right thing to order here."

So he read down the list of dishes as he took off his overcoat, which he handed to the footman. Then he said :

"A very spicy dinner—*potage bisque—poulet à la diable, râble de lièvre, homard à l'américaine, salade de légumes bien épicée*, and dessert. We will drink champagne."

The head waiter turned a smiling regard on the young woman. He picked up the card, murmuring :

"Will Monsieur Paul have sweet or dry ? "

"Champagne, very dry."

Henrietta was delighted to observe that this man knew her husband's name.

They sat side by side on the couch, and began to eat.

They had the light of ten wax candles, reflected in a large mirror marked all over by thousands of names traced on it by diamonds : they flung over the gleaming crystal what looked like an immense spider's web.

Henrietta drank steadily, to enliven her, though she felt giddy after the first glass. Paul, excited by his memories, kissed his wife's hand every moment. His eyes shone.

She was oddly excited by this not very reputable place, disturbed, happy, a little wanton but very thrilled. Two grave, silent waiters, accustomed to see all and forget all, to present themselves only when necessary, and to remove themselves at moments when emotions ran dangerously high, came and went swiftly and deftly.

By the middle of the dinner Henrietta was half drunk, more than half drunk, and Paul, very merry, was madly pressing her knee. She was babbling wildly now, impudently gay, with flushed cheeks and suffused burning eyes.

"Now, Paul, own up, don't you know I simply must know everything ? "

"Well, darling ? "

"I daren't say it."

"Say anything you want to."

"Have you had mistresses . . . many mistresses . . . before me?"

He hesitated, a little dubious, not sure whether he ought to keep quiet about his triumphs or boast of them.

She added :

"Oh, I implore you, do tell me, have you had ever so many?"

"Well, I've had several."

"How many?"

"Well, I really don't know . . . a man can't really be sure about these things, don't you know?"

"You didn't keep count of them?"

"Of course not."

"Oh, so you must have had ever so many."

"Of course."

"But about how many? . . . only just about?"

"But I haven't the least idea, darling. Some years I had ever so many, and there were other years when I had very few."

"How many a year, do you suppose?"

"Sometimes twenty or thirty, sometimes only four or five."

"Oh, that makes more than a hundred women altogether."

"Well, yes, about that"

"Oh, it's revolting!"

"Why do you call it revolting?"

"Because of course it is revolting, when you think of it . . . all those women . . . naked . . . and always . . . always the same thing. Oh, how revolting it is, all the same, more than a hundred women!"

He was shocked that she found it disgusting, and answered her with that superior manner which men assume to make women realise that they are talking nonsense.

"Well, upon my word, that's a queer thing to say; if it's disgusting to have a hundred women, it is just as disgusting to have one."

"Oh, no, nothing of the kind."

"Why not?"

"Because one woman, that is a real union, a real love which holds you to her, while a hundred women is just lust or misconduct. I don't understand how a man can press himself against all those dirty wenches . . ."

"They're not, they are very clean."

"It's impossible for them to be clean, living the life they do."

"But, on the contrary, it is just because of the life they live that they are so clean."

"Oh, fie, when you think that only the night before they were doing the same thing with another man! It's shameful."

"It's no more shameful than drinking out of this glass which was drunk from this morning by goodness knows who, which you may be sure has at any rate been well washed. . . ."

"Oh, be quiet, you disgust me."

"Then why did you ask me if I had had mistresses?"

"Tell me, these mistresses of yours, were they all girls of that sort?"

"No, no, of course not."

"What were they, then?"

"Well, actresses . . . some . . . some little shop-girls . . . and some . . . several society women."

"How many society women?"

"Six."

"Only six?"

"Yes."

"Were they pretty?"

"Of course."

"Prettier than the girls?"

"No."

"Which did you like best, the girls or the society women?"

"The girls."

"Oh, what nasty tastes you have! Why?"

"Because I don't care for amateur performers."

"Oh, horrible! You really are detestable, you know. But tell me, did it amuse you to go from one to the other?"

"Of course."

"Very much?"

"Very much."

"What is it that amused you? Aren't they all alike?"

"Of course not."

"Oh, women are not all alike?"

"Not at all alike."

"Not in anything?"

"Not in anything."

"How odd! How do they differ?"

"Altogether."

"In their bodies?"

"Yes, of course, in their bodies."

"All over their bodies?"

"All over their bodies."

"And what else?"

"Well, in their way of . . . of making love, of talking, of saying even little things."

"And . . . and it is very amusing to have a change?"

"Of course."

"And do men, too, vary?"

"I couldn't tell you that."

"You can't tell me?"

"No."

"They must vary."

"Yes . . . no doubt. . . ."

She sat sunk in thought, the glass of champagne in her hand. It was full, she drank it off at a gulp; then, placing it on the table, she flung both arms round her husband's neck, murmuring against his heart:

"Oh, my darling, I love you so! . . ."

He took her in a passionate embrace. A waiter who was entering withdrew, shutting the door; and the serving of the courses was suspended for about five minutes.

When the head waiter reappeared, solemn and dignified,

carrying the sweet, she was holding another full glass between her fingers, and, peering into the tawny translucent depths of the liquid, as if she saw there strange imagined things, she was murmuring in a reflective tone :

" Yes, it must be very amusing, all the same."

A MADMAN

HE DIED A HIGH-COURT JUDGE, AN UPRIGHT MAGISTRATE WHOSE irreproachable life was held up to honour in every court in France. Barristers, young puisne judges, judges, greeted with a low bow that marked their profound respect, his thin white impressive face, lighted up by two fathomless gleaming eyes.

He had given up his life to the pursuit of crime and the protection of the weak. Swindlers and murderers had had no more formidable enemy, for he seemed to read, in the depths of their souls, their most secret thoughts, and penetrate at a glance the dark twistings of their motives.

He had died, in his eighty-second year, everywhere honoured, and followed by the regrets of a whole nation. Soldiers in scarlet trousers had escorted him to his grave, and men in white ties had delivered themselves round his coffin of grief-stricken speeches and tears that seemed sincere.

And then came the strange document that the startled solicitor discovered in the desk where he had been accustomed to keep the dossiers of famous criminals.

It had for title :

“ WHY ? ”

.
June 20th, 1851. I have just left the court. I have condemned Blondel to death. Why did this man kill his five children? Why? One often comes across people to whose temperaments the taking of life affords a keen physical pleasure. Yes, yes, it must be a physical pleasure, perhaps the sharpest of all, for is not killing an act more like the act of creation than any other? To *make* and to *destroy*. In these two words is

contained the history of the universe, the history of all worlds, of all that exists, all. Why is it so intoxicating to kill?

June 25th. To think that there is a living being in there—a creature who loves, walks, runs! A living being. What is a living being? This thing possessed of life, bearing within itself the vital power of motion and a will that orders this motion. It is kin to nothing, this human being. Its feet do not belong to the ground. It is a germ of life wandering over the earth; and this germ of life, come I know not whence, can be destroyed at will. Then nothing, for ever nothing. It decays, it is ended.

June 26th. Then why is it a crime to kill? Yes, why? It is, on the contrary, a law of nature. The ordained purpose of every being is to kill: he kills to live, and he kills for the sake of killing. To kill is in our nature: we must kill. The beasts kill continually, every day, at every moment of their existence. Man kills continually to feed himself, but as he must also kill for sheer sensual satisfaction, he has invented sport. A child kills the insects that he finds, the little birds, all the little animals that come his way. But that does not satisfy the irresistible lust for wholesale killing which is in us. It is not enough to kill beasts; we must kill men too. In other days, we satisfied this need by human sacrifice. To-day the necessities of communal life have made murder a crime. We condemn it and punish the assassin. But since we cannot live without yielding to the innate and imperious instinct of death, we assuage it from time to time by wars in which one whole race butchers another. War is a debauch of blood, a debauch in which the armies sate themselves and on which not only plain citizens are drunken, but women, and the children who every evening read under the lamp the hysterical recital of the massacres.

One would have imagined that scorn would be meted out to those destined to accomplish these slaughterings of men. No. They are heaped with honours. They are clad in gold and

gorgeous raiment ; they wear feathers on their heads, decorations on their breasts ; and they are given crosses, rewards, honours of all kinds. They are haughty, respected, adored of women, acclaimed by the mob, and solely because their mission in life is to shed human blood. They drag through the streets their instruments of death, which the black-coated passer-by regards with envy. For killing is the glorious law thrust by nature into the profoundest impulse of our being. There is nothing more lovely and more honourable than to kill.

June 30th. To kill is the law ; because nature loves immortal youth. She seems to cry through all her unconscious acts : "Hasten ! Hasten ! Hasten !" As she destroys, so she renews.

July 2nd. Being—what is being ? All and nothing. Through thought, it is the reflection of all things. Through memory and for science, it is an epitome of the world, the tale of which it bears within itself. Mirror of things, and mirror of deeds, each human being becomes a little universe within the universe.

But travel ; look at the people swarming everywhere, and man is nothing now, nothing now, nothing ! Get into a ship, put a wide space between yourself and the crowded shore, and you will soon see nothing but the coast. The infinitesimal speck of being disappears, so tiny it is, so insignificant. Traverse Europe in a swift train and look out through the window. Men, men, always men, innumerable, inglorious, swarming in the fields, swarming in the streets ; dull-witted peasants able to do no more than turn up the earth ; ugly women able to do no more than prepare food for their men, and breed. Go to India, go to China, and you will see scurrying about more thousands of creatures, who are born, live, and die without leaving more trace than the ant crushed to death on the road. Go to the country of black men, herded in their mud huts ; to the country of fair-skinned Arabs sheltered under a brown canvas that flaps

in the wind, and you will understand that the solitary individual being is nothing, nothing. The race is all. What is the individual, the individual member of a wandering desert tribe? And men who are wise do not trouble themselves overmuch about death. Man counts for nothing with them. A man kills his enemy: it is war. That, in the old days, was the way of the world, in every great house, in every province.

Yes, journey over the world and watch the swarming of the innumerable and nameless human beings. Nameless? Aye, there's the rub! To kill is a crime because we have enumerated human beings. When they are born, they are registered, named, baptized. The law takes charge of them. Very well, then! The man who is not registered is of no account: kill him in the desert, kill him in the hills or in the plain, what does it matter! Nature loves death: she will not punish it.

What is verily sacred, is the social community. That's it! It is that which protects man. The individual is sacred because he is a member of the social community. Homage to the social state, the legal God. On your knees!

The State itself can kill because it has the right to alter the social community. When it has had two hundred thousand men butchered in a war, it erases them from the community, it suppresses them by the hands of its registrars. That is the end of it. But we who cannot alter the records of the town halls, we must respect life. Social community, glorious divinity who reigns in the temples of the municipalities, I salute you. You are stronger than nature. Ha, ha!

July 3rd. To kill must be a strange pleasure and of infinite relish to a man. To have there, standing before him, a living, thinking being: to thrust in him a little hole, only a little hole, to see pouring out that red stuff which we call blood, which makes life, and then to have in front of one only a lump of nerveless, flesh, cold, inert, emptied of thought.

August 5th. I who have spent my life in judging, condemning,

in killing by uttered words, in killing by the guillotine such as have killed by the knife, I, I, if I did as do all the assassins whom I have struck down, I, I, who would know it ?

August 10th. Who would ever know it ? Who would suspect me, me, especially if I chose a creature in whose removal I have no interest ?

August 15th. The temptation. The temptation has entered into me like a worm that crawls. It crawls, it moves, it roves through my whole body, in my mind, which thinks only of one thing—to kill ; in my eyes, which lust to see blood, to see something die ; in my ears, where there sounds continually something strange, monstrous, shattering, and stupefying, like the last cry of a human creature ; in my legs, which tingle with desire to go, to go to the spot where the thing could come to pass ; in my hands, which tremble with lust to kill. What a glorious act it would be, a rare act, worthy of a free man, greater than other men, captain of his soul, and a seeker after exquisite sensations !

August 22nd. I could resist no longer. I have killed a small beast just to try, to begin with.

Jean, my man, had a goldfinch in a cage hung in a window of the servant's room. I sent him on an errand and I took the little bird in my hand, in my hand where I felt the beating of his heart. He was warm. I went up to my room. From time to time, I clutched him harder, his heart beat faster ; it was frightful and delicious. I all but choked him. But I should not have seen the blood.

Then I took the scissors, short nail-scissors, and I cut his throat in three strokes, so cleverly. He opened his beak, he struggled to escape me, but I held him fast, oh, I held him ; I would have held a mad bulldog, and I saw the blood run. How beautiful blood is, red, gleaming, clear ! I longed to

drink it. I wetted the end of my tongue with it. It was good. But he had so little of it, the poor little bird ! I had no time to enjoy the sight of it as I would have liked. It must be glorious to see a bull bleed to death.

And then I did all that assassins do, that real ones do. I washed the scissors, I washed my hands, I threw out the water, and I carried the body, the corpse, into the garden to bury it. I hid it in the strawberry bed. It will never be found. Every day I shall eat a strawberry from that plant. In very truth, how one can enjoy life when one knows how !

My man wept ; he supposed that his bird had flown. How could he suspect me ? Ha, ha !

Aug. 25th. I must kill a man. I must.

Aug. 30th. It is done. What a simple thing it is !

I went to take a walk in the Bois de Vernes. I was thinking of nothing, no, of nothing. And there was a child on the road, a little boy eating a slice of bread and butter.

He stood still to let me pass and said :

" Good day, Monsieur le Président."

And the thought came into my head : " Suppose I were to kill him ? "

I replied :

" Are you all alone, my boy ? "

" Yes, sir."

" All alone in the wood ? "

" Yes, sir."

The desire to kill intoxicated me like strong drink. I approached him stealthily, sure that he would run away. And then I seized him by the throat . . . I squeezed him, I squeezed him with all my strength. He looked at me with terrified eyes. What eyes ! Quite round, fathomless, clear, terrible. I have never experienced so savage an emotion . . . but so short. He clutched my wrists with his little hands, and his body

writhed like a feather in the fire. Then he moved no more.

My heart thudded, ah! the bird's heart! I flung the body in a ditch, then grasses over him.

I went home again; I dined well. What an utterly simple affair!

That evening I was very gay, light-hearted, young again. I spent the rest of the evening at the Prefect's house. They found me good company.

But I have not seen blood. I am calm.

Aug. 30th. The corpse has been found. They are searching for the murderer. Ha, ha!

Sept. 1st. They have arrested two tramps. Proofs are lacking.

Sept. 2nd. The parents have been to see me. They wept. Ha, ha!

Oct. 6th. They have discovered nothing. Some wandering vagabond must have struck the blow. Ha, ha! If I had only seen the blood flow, I think I should now be quiet in my mind.

Oct. 10th. The lust to kill possesses my every nerve. It is like the furious passions of love that torture us at twenty.

Oct. 20th. Yet another. I was walking along the river, after breakfast. And I saw, under a willow, a fisherman fast asleep. It was high noon. A spade was stuck, it might have been for the purpose, in a near-by field of potatoes.

I took it, I came back; I lifted it like a club and, cutting through it with a single blow, I split the fisherman's head right open. Oh, how he bled! Crimson blood, full of brains. It trickled into the water, very gently. And I went on my way

at a solemn pace. If anyone had seen me! Ha, ha! I should have made an excellent assassin.

Oct. 25th. The affair of the fisherman has roused a great outcry. His nephew, who used to fish with him, has been accused of the murder.

Oct. 26th. The examining magistrate declares that the nephew is guilty. Every one in the town believes it. Ha, ha!

Oct. 27th. The nephew has put up a poor defence. He declares that he had gone to the village to buy bread and cheese. He swears that his uncle was killed in his absence. Who believes him?

Oct. 28th. The nephew has partially confessed, so utterly have they made him lose his head. Ha, ha! Justice!

Nov. 15th. Crushing evidence accumulates against the nephew, who will inherit from his uncle. I shall preside at the assizes.

Jan. 25th. To death! To death! To death! I have condemned him to death. Ha, ha! The Solicitor-General spoke like an angel. Ha, ha! Yet another. I shall go to see him executed.

March 20th. It is done. He was guillotined this morning. He made a good end, very good. It gave me infinite pleasure. How sweet it is to see a man's head cut off! The blood spurted out like a wave, like a wave. Oh, if I could, I would have liked to have bathed in it! What intoxicating ecstasy to crouch below it, to receive it in my hair and on my face, and rise up all crimson, all crimson! Ah, if people knew!

Now I shall wait, I can afford to wait. So little a thing might trip me up.

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The manuscript contained several more papers, but without relating any fresh crime.

The alienists, to whom it was entrusted, declare that there exist in the world many undetected madmen, as cunning and as redoubtable as this monstrous maniac.